

Winning the Long War: Amplifying Muslim Challenges to al-Qaeda

**A Monograph
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Abstract

WINNING THE LONG WAR: AMPLIFYING MUSLIM CHALLENGES TO AL-QAEDA by
MAJ Romeo C. Qureishi, U.S. Army, 77 pages.

Criticism and condemnation of al-Qaeda that originate from the worldwide Muslim community present the most formidable challenge to its existence and legitimacy as an organization and movement. There is ample literature that questions whether or not there are Muslim challenges to the ideology and harmful acts of violent extremists such as al-Qaeda. However there is a growing body of literature from the worldwide Muslim community that challenges al-Qaeda. Consequently, challenges to al-Qaeda that originate from the worldwide Muslim community are critical because they are a component in any strategy to defeat al-Qaeda. The identification, amplification, and exploitation of these Muslim challenges will serve to defeat al-Qaeda.

The purpose of this monograph is to determine the nature of this Muslim challenge to al-Qaeda. This is accomplished by analyzing the recent revisions of the former *mujahid* that helped create al-Qaeda and developed its *jihadi* ideology, Sayyid Imam. In these revisions entitled *Rationalizing Jihad*, Sayyid Imam criticizes and condemns al-Qaeda and other violent extremists. To determine the legitimacy of his revisions, the major themes of *Rationalizing Jihad* are compared to the prescriptions in classical Islamic jurisprudence. Sayyid Imam's stature and influence within the *mujahidin* community is so great it prompted an immediate response from al-Qaeda's intellectual leader and second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri. His response and that of nine other former and current *mujahidin* are analyzed in order to examine the rift in al-Qaeda's *jihadi* ideology and challenges to its tactics, strategy, and ideology. Finally, five recent initiatives by respected and prominent members of the worldwide Muslim community are analyzed to demonstrate the Muslim challenge to al-Qaeda. These challenges from Sayyid Imam, the ideological rift among *mujahidin* such as al-Zawahiri, initiatives from the worldwide Muslim community, and the identification, amplification, and exploitation of these challenges will contribute to the ultimate defeat al-Qaeda.

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Introduction

Background and Significance: The Rift in and Challenges to Al-Qaeda's Ideology

Al-Qaeda¹ remains a resilient and influential organization and movement despite the U.S.-led global campaign to defeat it.² There are numerous reasons for its ability to maintain its global power and influence, which include al-Qaeda's ability to evolve its tactics and adapt its methods.³ For example, its networks are more dispersed and less centralized, it has increasingly used the Internet and mass media to its advantage, and it continues to inspire groups and individuals who have never met its leaders. However, the primary reason al-Qaeda is able to maintain its global power and influence is its ideology,⁴ a set or system of ideas, principles, and beliefs characteristic of a group. *Ideology* is the decisive factor that allows groups such as al-Qaeda to recruit new fighters and raise funds for militant operations and propaganda. Al-Qaeda's ideology continues to inspire, radicalize, motivate, and receive, generate, and sustain support.

Al-Qaeda has developed a very powerful and influential ideology from the foundation provided by early *jihadi* writers such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad ibn 'abd al-Wahhab, Hassan

¹ Al-Qaeda is defined as any individual, group, or affiliate that is inspired or motivated by al-Qaeda.

² Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al-Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 135. "In the seven years since 9/11, al-Qaeda has remained a deadly foe and is still planning further attacks on the United States, despite some serious blows to its network."

³ National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (September 2006), 5. "Yet the enemy we face today in the War on Terror is not the same enemy we faced on September 11. Our effective counterterrorist efforts, in part, have forced the terrorist to evolve and modify their ways of doing business."

⁴ Texts from al-Qaeda and *jihad* experts such as Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower*, Michael Scheuer's *Through Our Enemies Eyes*, Mary Habeck's *Knowing the Enemy*, Bruce Riedel's *The Search for Al-Qaeda*, and Jarret Brachman's *Global Jihadism* clearly identify and address al-Qaeda's ideology as the most critical component of the organizations ability to survive, motivate, inspire, recruit, and generate support.

al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Sayyid Abdul A'la Mawdudi.⁵ The two *fatwas* issued by Usama bin Laden in 1996 and 1998 are primary documents that provide keen insight and critical elucidation of al-Qaeda's ideology.⁶ This ideology proclaims that the United States, the West, and its Arab allies have oppressed, humiliated, and disrespected Muslims and Islam worldwide. Consequently, the major goals of al-Qaeda are to conduct a defensive *jihad* to violently defeat the United States, the West, and its Arab allies, restore the dignity and respect of Islam, and reestablish the Islamic caliphate. Its means to achieve these goals are violence in the form of killing, martyrdom, bombing, decapitation, and the overthrow of Western and Arab rulers.⁷ All of this violence is to be conducted in the name of and in defense of Islam. It is this ideology that violent extremists⁸ such as al-Qaeda use to inspire, radicalize, motivate, and receive, generate,

⁵ Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadi Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), Chapter 2 – Historical Context.

⁶ Usama bin Laden, "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," August 1996, Translated by PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html (accessed September 11, 2009) and Usama bin Laden, "Declaration of Holy War or *Jihad* against the West and Israel," February 23, 1998, Translated by PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1998.html (accessed September 11, 2009).

⁷ Usama bin Laden's 1998 *fatwa* exhorts Muslims to kill Americans and their allies, both civilian and military. His 1996 *fatwa* urges Muslims – especially calling on Muslim youth – to conduct bombings (such as those in Riyadh in November 1995 against a Saudi National Guard training center and the Khobar Towers bombing in June 25, 1996), killings (implores youth to kill unbelievers or *mushrikeen*), sanctions martyrdom ("...enter the garden – paradise...decorated with jewels of belief, married off to the beautiful ones, wedded to seventy-two of the pure Houries..), and to behead disbelievers ("...so when you meet those who disbelieve, then smite the necks...there is only killing and neck smiting").

⁸ Peter Pace, *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*, (Washington D.C.: The Pentagon, 2006), 3. The term "violent extremists" is employed in the same context used by the U.S. government (in such documents as national strategies) to describe individual or groups that – because of their political, social, religious, or ideological beliefs – endorses, condones, justifies, commits, promotes, or supports the use violence or the threat of violence to cause injury or death to people for political, economic, or social purposes who accentuate differences and division and exploit fears based on ignorance or prejudice. "Extremists are those who (1) oppose – in principle and practice -- the right of people to choose how to live and how to organize their societies and (2) support the murder of ordinary people to advance extremist ideological purposes."

and sustain support. Recently, however, there is a growing body of work originating from Muslim communities worldwide⁹ that counters and challenges its ideology.

Preeminent among Muslim writers who condemn al-Qaeda is Sayyid Imam Abd al-Aziz al-Sherif.¹⁰ While al-Qaeda is his focus, he condemns all other Muslims who violate *sharia* and “spill blood and wreck property without justification.”¹¹ A 60-year old Egyptian medical doctor currently incarcerated in Egypt’s Torah Prison, Sayyid Imam is famous for his writings that significantly influenced *jihad*¹² and al-Qaeda’s ideology.¹³ Sayyid Imam’s previous writings on *jihad* espoused violence, martyrdom, the eternal war with non-Muslims, and an interpretation of *takfir* (excommunication) that called for the death of anyone who did not adhere to the version of Islam he interpreted. In late 2007, he wrote fifteen articles entitled *Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World* in which he revises the *jihadi* ideology he previously promoted with the aim to stop al-Qaeda’s violence and its violations of *sharia*.¹⁴ In it he strongly condemns the operations,

⁹ George Readings, James Brandon, and Richard Phelps, “Islamism and Language: How Using the Wrong Words Reinforces Islamist Narratives”, QuilliamFoundation.org, 2011, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/acatalog/books.html> (accessed April 1, 2011), 4. Use of the term “Muslim communities worldwide” is deliberate in order to accurately describe the diversity and majority of Muslims around the world in stark contrast to the very small minority that *mujahidin* such as al-Qaeda represent.

¹⁰ He is also known to use the pseudonym’s “Dr. Fadl” and Abd Al-Qader Bin ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz.

¹¹ Sayyid Imam, “Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World,” Open Source Center, (November 18): Part 1, <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content/html> (accessed September 5, 2009). Citations for *Rationalizing Jihad* will indicate the part and not the page because each part is an article that was serialized with no pages indicated.

¹² “*Jihad* means to war against non-Muslims, and it etymologically derived from the word *mujahada*, signifying warfare to establish the religion. And it is the lesser jihad. As for the greater jihad, it is spiritual warfare against the lower self (nafs), which is why the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said as he was returning from jihad.” Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2008), 599.

¹³ Lawrence Wright, “The Rebellion Within: an al-Qaeda Mastermind Questions Terrorism,” *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008, 1, 3-5.

¹⁴ Sayyid Imam, “Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World,” Open Source Center (November 18 to December 26, 2007). <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content/html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

methods, and tactics of al-Qaeda and other *mujahidin*¹⁵ for the death and destruction it has wrought and the perversion and misapplication of Islamic law on *jihad*. Through these series of articles, Sayyid Imam cogently refutes, renounces, and undermines al-Qaeda's current ideology. To add legitimacy to his revisions, *Rationalizing Jihad* was approved and recommended for publication by the world renowned and respected Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy in Egypt.¹⁶

Sayyid Imam identifies the death of a significant number of Muslims and the destruction of their lands as a primary reason for revising his position on the conduct of *jihad*. He attributes this death and destruction to *mujahidin* acts and he argues that the violence *mujahidin* have conducted in the name of and in defense of Islam has caused more harm than good. Salient examples include the inadvertent death of a young Egyptian schoolgirl in 1993 by the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ also known as *al Jihad*) after a botched attempt to kill Egyptian Prime Minister Atef Sidqi. This not only caused a massive crackdown by Egyptian authorities on EIJ, the group and other *mujahidin* but, more importantly, these *mujahidin* received significant negative publicity from the Egyptian population.¹⁷ More recently, the brutal deaths of a significant number of Muslims in Iraq and the multitude of Muslims killed since 9/11 – in the name of and in defense of Islam - caused Sayyid Imam to critically rethink his position and ultimately revise his

¹⁵ Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2008), 599. *Mujahidin* (plural; *mujahid* singular) will be the term used in this monograph to describe, as al-Zawahiri does in "Exoneration" and Sayyid Imam with "Rationalizing Jihad", those fighters that conduct warfare or *jihad* to establish Islam. The term "*jihadist*" is not used as it is a less appropriate term and is a Western description to categorize these fighters. *Mujahidin* is a more appropriate term using Naqib al-Misri's definition "*mujahada*".

¹⁶ Khalil Al-Anani, "Jihadi Revisionism: Will it Save the World?" *Middle East Brief*, April 2009, 3. The approval and recommendation from al-Azhar is of great significance because it is recognized to be the world's premiere center for the study of Arabic literature, Islamic religion and culture, and Sunni Islam. It is viewed with the highest regard and respect from Muslims.

¹⁷ Jarrett M. Brachman and William F. McCants, *Stealing Al-Qa'idas Playbook* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2006), 11.

understanding on how *jihad* should be waged. He argues that such violence can never be justified under *sharia* and thus must never be used as justification to use such violence: “There is nothing that invokes the anger of God and his wrath like spilling blood and wrecking property without justification.”¹⁸ As a result of the reevaluation of his position on *jihad*, Sayyid Imam developed and presented his revisions in *Rationalizing Jihad*.

Sayyid Imam’s revisions may be viewed as a part of the overall revisions within the *jihadi* community. The rift within the current *jihadi* movement and al-Qaeda began with the renunciation of violence by Gamaa Islamiya (GI) or Islamic Group in 1997 and the intent of some in the EIJ¹⁹ to take part in this nonviolent initiative.²⁰ While GI renounced violence, EIJ did not.²¹ As the former leader of EIJ, Sayyid Imam has taken the initiative to call for the renunciation of violence by EIJ, other *mujahidin*, and al-Qaeda.

Sayyid Imam condemns the use of violence by *mujahidin* such as al-Qaeda because he contends it is immoral and in violation of Islamic law. He uses legal interpretations to counter the ideology of al-Qaeda and other violent Islamic groups that share its interpretation of *jihad*. In his revisions, Sayyid Imam renounces violence and challenges al-Qaeda using Islamic law. His revisions undermine al-Qaeda’s legitimacy by using its theological justifications against them. Consequently, its acts are not only immoral but they are illegal. Finally, Sayyid Imam advocates

¹⁸ Sayyid Imam, “Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World,” Open Source Center, (November 18): Part 1, <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content/html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

¹⁹ Ibid., 6.

²⁰ Ibid., Lawrence Wright argues that the roots of the rift in al-Qaeda’s ideology began in 1968 when Sayyid Imam and al-Zawahiri met.

²¹ LTC Shereef Gouda Mohamed Elaraishy’s, “The Intellectual Reviews of Fundamentalist Islamic Groups’ Leaders and their Impact on Jihadi Action, the Muslim World, and the West,” *U.S. Army Command and General Staff College* (June 2010), 43-71. Provides a detailed account of the revisionism within Islamic groups such as Gamaa Islamiya and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

the use of *Da'wa* – the practice of calling others to Islam – as a safer, non-violent, and religiously sanctioned means to spread Islam.

As a result of Sayyid Imam's revisions, a rift within al-Qaeda's ideology developed. The basic principle of al-Qaeda's *jihadi* ideology is the absolute unity of God - the first tenet of Islam known as *tawhid*.²² Both the worldwide community of Muslims and *mujahidin* such as al-Qaeda believe that God is the only being who deserves worship, only God's laws have significance, and Islam is the only form of worship while other religions are evil.²³ The difference between the worldwide community of Muslims and *mujahidin* such as al-Qaeda is that the latter have developed an ideology that justifies all of their actions and doctrine in the name of and in defense of Islam using their interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence. This ideology is used by al-Qaeda to inspire, motivate, and justify violence against both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The revisions from Sayyid Imam have deepened the rift between al-Qaeda's ideology and those that condemn it for two primary reasons. First, Sayyid Imam helped develop and codify al-Qaeda's and *jihadi* ideology through his influence on their leaders and his seminal writings such as *Foundations in Preparing Jihad* and *The Comprehensive Book about the Pursuit of Glorious Knowledge*.^{24,25} Now this same person, Sayyid Imam, who significantly influenced al-Qaeda and *jihadi* ideology, condemns the ideology he once developed and advocated. Second, *Rationalizing Jihad* directly challenges al-Qaeda's tactics, strategy, and interpretation of Islamic law from its

²² Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadi Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), Chapter 4 – *Our Aqida*. Provides a detailed account of al-Qaeda's ideology.

²³ Ibid., 59-66.

²⁴ Jarrett M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 74-78.

²⁵ Lawrence Wright, "The Rebellion Within: An al-Qaeda Mastermind Questions Terrorism," *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008, 2-5.

use of excessive violence to its killing of innocents to its treatment of non-Muslims to its requirements to conduct *jihad*.

Due to the revisions in his *jihadi* ideology and his stature as a leading al-Qaeda ideologue, there have been numerous responses to Sayyid Imam's fifteen articles. His refutation is very powerful because Sayyid Imam is an influential figure in al-Qaeda, among *mujahidin*, and the *jihadi* movement. Moreover, his scholarly knowledge of Islam, the *Quran*, and the *hadith* is irreproachable. The potential impact of Sayyid Imam's revisions was so significant that they elicited a vehement reaction from al-Qaeda's intellectual leader, ideological brains,²⁶ and second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Zawahiri's reaction came in the form of a book entitled *Exoneration: A Treatise on Exonerating of the Nation of the Pen and the Sword of the Denigrating Charge of Being Irresolute and Weak* released in the spring of 2008 that is more than twice as long as Sayyid Imam's fifteen articles. In addition to al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration*, numerous leading *mujahidin* leaders wrote reactions to Sayyid Imam's work that were both for and against his revisions of al-Qaeda's ideology. It is critical to review and analyze the responses of leading *mujahidin* as every *mujahidin* group such as al-Qaeda has demonstrated their willingness and ability to act on their statements.

There is a growing body of literature that counters al-Qaeda's violent, brutal, immoral, and illegitimate methods which views its tactics as un-Islamic and in violation of Islamic law on *jihad*. This literature that condemns al-Qaeda and other violent extremists includes recent works and initiatives from renown, credible, and legitimate sources who are former *mujahidin*, Muslim scholars, or both. In this literature, al-Qaeda and other violent extremists are criticized, condemned, and discredited. Since Sayyid Imam's revisions, there have been five prominent refutations of violent extremists such as al-Qaeda and its ideology. These five prominent

²⁶ Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al-Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 16.

initiatives that originate from the Muslim community worldwide includes *Recantations* written by the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) in the winter of 2009, the creation of the Quilliam Group which is the world's first counter-extremist think-tank in the spring of 2010, the *fatwa* (ruling or edict based on Islamic law) that denounces terrorism by the renowned Pakistani scholar Dr. Muhammad al-Qadri, the Mardin Declaration that challenges the basis of al-Qaeda's violent *jihad*, and the criticism of the strategy and theological underpinnings of al-Qaeda's ideology by the well-known Egyptian cleric Dr. Umar Abd al-Kafy's in the summer of 2010. Sayyid Imam's revisions, al-Zawahiri's response, the debate among current and former *mujahidin* leaders, and these five prominent initiatives demonstrate a rift in and challenges to al-Qaeda's ideology. It is through these initiatives that originate from within the Muslim worldwide community that al-Qaeda's ideology will be delegitimized and discredited.

Since these revisions invalidate al-Qaeda's ideology, this rift will have consequences for four different groups. First, al-Qaeda will be put on guard and must expend time and resources to find ways to defend their ideology against these challenges. Second, this rift and challenges will cast doubt and concern over groups and individuals planning to support or embrace al-Qaeda's ideology. Third, the community of 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide who do not support al-Qaeda's ideology will have a voice against al-Qaeda. Fourth, non-Muslims worldwide will have a better understanding of the Muslim religion that sharpens the differences between the moderate Islam the majority of the Muslim communities worldwide shares and the ideology a small group of Muslims practices such as al-Qaeda.

The purpose of this monograph is to determine the nature of the Muslim challenge to al-Qaeda, *mujahidin*, and violent extremists. This monograph argues that the challenge is ideological because it is a matter of disagreement between Islamic leaders over the application of Islamic law and doctrine in the conduct of *jihad*. This monograph will accomplish this through an analysis of Sayyid Imam's revisions, al-Zawahiri's response, the different viewpoints of

mujahidin leaders, and the growing literature against al-Qaeda in order to identify a rift within and challenges to al-Qaeda's ideology.

Literature Review

To capture the ideological rift and challenges to al-Qaeda and *mujahidin*, this monograph employs the use of primary sources from the *mujahidin* themselves or Muslim scholars. The concern with secondary sources is that the interpretation or bias of the secondary source's author may influence the analysis. The intent of the use of primary sources is to lend credibility to the analysis, interpretation, and assessment of the words of *mujahidin* – past and present – and Muslim leaders and scholars who have contributed to the growing literature against al-Qaeda. Primary sources include Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad*, al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration*, the LIFG's *Recantations*, and the nine reactions to *Rationalizing Jihad* from current and former *mujahidin*. These set of primary sources used in this monograph are English translations by the respected Open Source Center. In addition, other primary sources include English translations of the five initiatives described above. While these are in fact translations, there is no reason to doubt their accuracy and veracity as the intent is to provide an understanding of these primary sources to the widest audience possible. Finally, this also applies to the classic text in Islamic jurisprudence, *Reliance of the Traveller* that was written in the fourteenth century by the noted Islamic scholar of the *Shafi'i* school, Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, whose English translation by Nuh Ha Mim Keller is recognized by the worldwide Muslim community as accurate and legitimate.

To reinforce the primary sources and the analysis and synthesis of this monograph, numerous secondary sources are used. Preeminent among these secondary sources is an article on the challenge to al-Qaeda entitled *The Rebellion from Within: An al-Qaeda Mastermind Questions Terrorism* by Lawrence Wright. Published in *The New Yorker* magazine in the summer of 2008, this seminal article is arguably the first in the English language to provide an in-

depth – over fifteen pages – of analysis of the background, the rift, and potential consequences in the English language. While there were numerous newspaper and Internet articles in both English and Arabic that notified the world of Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* and its revisions, none provided the extensive analysis Wright provided of Sayyid Imam in *The Rebellion from Within*. Credibility for Wright's expertise is evidenced in his famous, respected, and awarded narrative of al-Qaeda entitled *The Looming Tower: al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*. This monograph uses the latter as a secondary source in addition to the works of respected authors in the field of al-Qaeda and *jihad* to include Michael Scheuer's *Through Our Enemies Eyes*, Mary Habeck's *Knowing the Enemy*, Bruce Riedel's *The Search for Al-Qaeda*, and Jarret Brachman's *Global Jihadism*. While Majid Khadduri's *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* is a secondary source, it is in English and is a respected account of Islamic legal theory and doctrine.

Finally, all the U.S. national security, defense, military, and combating terrorism strategies from the past decade are utilized to provide the foundation and a framework to identify, amplify, exploit, and combat violent extremist groups such as al-Qaeda. In addition, these strategies provide the basis, rationale, guidance, and requirement for the United States, in the case of this monograph, those within the U.S. military, to combat violent extremists groups. Since members of the U.S. government are bound by duty to combat violent extremist groups, it is requisite for them to contribute to the defeat, dismantling, and disruption of al-Qaeda and its affiliates.²⁷ Finally, these strategies clearly indicate that to defeat, dismantle, and disrupt violent extremists, the ideology of such individuals and groups must be attacked, condemned, and discredited.²⁸

²⁷ Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington D.C.: The White House, May 2010), 19.

²⁸ Robert Gates, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington D.C.: The Pentagon, 2008), 14. "Victory will include discrediting extremist ideology, creating fissures between and among extremist groups..."

Methodology

This monograph will determine the nature of the Muslim challenge to al-Qaeda, *mujahidin*, and violent extremists in five ways. First, recognized and well-respected texts on Islamic jurisprudence – Naqib al-Misri’s *Reliance of the Traveller* and Khadduri’s *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* – will be used to provide a background and legitimate authority on four major themes of *jihad* addressed by both Sayyid Imam and al-Zawahiri. Both of these works provide the Islamic jurisprudence that is accepted and acknowledged by the Muslim community worldwide to demonstrate the lawful and accepted uses of *jihad*. Second, this monograph will identify and analyze the seven major themes in Sayyid Imam’s *Rationalizing Jihad* to demonstrate how he condemns and discredits al-Qaeda, *mujahidin*, and violent extremists. This part of the monograph identifies the contribution of Sayyid Imam’s work in intensifying the rift between al-Qaeda and the growing community of *mujahidin* who have revised their *jihadi* ideology. It also presents the way in which Sayyid Imam’s revisions are a challenge to al-Qaeda. This will be followed by the section that identifies and analyzes the six major themes in al-Zawahiri’s *Exoneration* to demonstrate the nature of his counterargument to Sayyid Imam’s revisions, which results in intensifying the ideological rift. Fourth, this monograph will present the nine responses of leading current and former *mujahidin* that support and condemn Sayyid Imam’s revisions. These responses – both for and against the revisions – contribute to the growing rift and challenges to al-Qaeda. A short biography of each of the authors will be provided to add context to their responses. The final method this monograph will determine the nature of the Muslim challenge to al-Qaeda is through the identification and analysis of five recent initiatives from the Muslim community worldwide that counters, condemns, and discredits al-Qaeda and violent extremism. The purpose of this methodology is to identify, amplify, and exploit the growing literature that intensifies the rift within al-Qaeda’s ideology and challenges it.

Through this methodology, the nature of the Muslim challenge to al-Qaeda and violent extremists is demonstrated.

Organization

This monograph is organized into seven major parts. First, the introduction provides the background to the ideological rift and challenges to al-Qaeda. In addition, the introduction establishes the requirement to combat the ideology of al-Qaeda and violent extremists as prescribed by U.S. national strategies. Furthermore, the introduction will provide the reasons that lend credibility to Sayyid Imam's legitimacy as a leader and expert on *jihadi* ideology. The next part will present the four major themes from classical Islamic jurisprudence that relate directly to the rift between Sayyid Imam and al-Zawahiri. These themes include rulings on killing, the requirements to conduct *jihad*, violence against Muslim rulers and states, and the idea of proportionality between aggressors in a conflict. The purpose of introducing this key Islamic jurisprudence is to reveal and forward the argument that Sayyid Imam's revisions comply with these rulings – recognized by the Muslim community worldwide - while al-Zawahiri's responses do not. The third part of this monograph analyzes Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* to present the seven primary themes of his revisions. This is followed by al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration* to outline his response. A review of al-Zawahiri's six major themes in *Exoneration* reveals the organization of his treatise, which addresses each part and all of the themes of Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad*. The fifth part of this monograph sets forth nine responses – three in support of and six against – from current and former *mujahidin* leaders. This part serves to demonstrate the intensification of the rift in al-Qaeda's ideology as a result of the debate over Sayyid Imam's revisions. The sixth part of this monograph demonstrates the growing challenge to al-Qaeda and violent extremists with the introduction of five notable and respected initiatives from the worldwide Muslim community. These initiatives pose a serious challenge to al-Qaeda and violent extremists because they dispute, denounce, and discredit its ideology, tactics, and strategy

that advocate violence and misinterpret and misapply *sharia*. Finally, this monograph concludes with recommendations for further research on initiatives from the Muslim community worldwide that intensify the rift and challenges al-Qaeda and violent extremists. In addition, the final section of this monograph recommends that these initiatives from the Muslim community worldwide continue to be identified, amplified, and exploited to ultimately defeat al-Qaeda and violent extremists.

The Requirement to Combat al-Qaeda's Ideology

According to U.S. national strategies published in the last decade,²⁹ the United States is engaged in a war of ideas – an ideology characterized by what these strategies have defined as violent extremism. All of these strategies focus on defeating this violent extremism. The enemy is identified as al-Qaeda.³⁰ An enduring national interest of the U.S. is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda. The objective of the U.S. is to win the Long War against this violent extremism.³¹ This violent extremism inspires and motivates groups and individuals to conduct reprehensible acts against humanity and to provide critical support for al-Qaeda to continue to receive, generate, and sustain its operations. In order to win, the U.S. must win the battle of ideas against the violent extremist ideology embraced by al-Qaeda.³² The role of the Department of Defense is to attack this violent extremist ideology - identified as al-Qaeda's center of gravity.³³

²⁹ For this monograph, this includes the National Military Strategy of 2011, the National Security Strategy of 2010, the National Defense Strategy of 2008, the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism of 2006, the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism of 2006, and the National Military Strategy of 2004.

³⁰ Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington D.C.: The White House, 2010), 20. "We are at war with a specific network, al-Qa'ida, and its terrorist affiliates who support efforts to attack the United States, our allies, and partners."

³¹ Robert M. Gates, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington D.C.: The Pentagon, 2008), 8. "...winning the Long War against violent extremism movements will be the central objective of the U.S....We face a clash of arms, a war of ideas..."

³² George W. Bush, *National Strategy for Combatting Terrorism* (Washington D.C.: The White House, 2006), 7-8. "America is at war with a transnational terrorist movement fueled by a radical ideology

Attacking this violent extremist ideology entails denouncing and discrediting al-Qaeda and establishing the conditions that counter ideological support for al-Qaeda. This includes supporting local efforts to delegitimize al-Qaeda, developing information operations campaigns that highlight al-Qaeda's brutality and subvert its ideology, supporting public affairs operations that condemn al-Qaeda and discredit its ideology, and ensuring all levels of military leadership are cognizant of and well-versed on the morally bankrupt ideology of al-Qaeda and the current efforts to counter it. In the long run, delegitimizing al-Qaeda's ideology is likely to be the most effective means to ultimately defeat al-Qaeda. Identifying, amplifying, and exploiting this ideological rift in and challenges to al-Qaeda can serve as the foundation to win this battle of ideas.

Sayyid Imam's Bona Fides – His Credentials as an Expert on *Jihad*

There are five primary reasons for Sayyid Imam's notable reputation and esteemed credentials. First, he is known to be one of the founding fathers of al-Qaeda.³⁴ In August 1988 Sayyid Imam and a group of fifteen leading *mujahidin* - which included Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, the highly influential Palestinian scholar and cleric who significantly shaped Usama bin Laden's *mujahidin* ideas, Usama bin Laden, and Mohammad Atef, former military chief of al-Qaeda - created al-Qaeda to continue their *jihad* after the Soviets left Afghanistan. In addition, Sayyid Imam is a well-respected *jihadi* ideologue whose writings – *Foundations in Preparing Jihad* and *The Comprehensive Book about the Pursuit of Glorious Knowledge* – laid the foundation for

of hatred, oppression, and murder...In the long run, winning the War on Terror means winning the battle of ideas."

³³ Ibid., 6-7. "The Armed Forces of the U.S. will...counter the enemy's ideology...[and] contribute to the establishment of conditions that counter ideological support for terrorism."

³⁴ Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 150-153.

global *jihad*, represents al-Qaeda's principles, and was taught in al-Qaeda training camps.³⁵

According to an exhaustive study of militant *jihadi* ideologues, Sayyid Imam is described to be as one its most influential living thinkers.³⁶ He is perhaps the most important modern thinker responsible for shaping the violent *jihadi* movement. Third, Sayyid Imam is esteemed for his abilities as a Muslim scholar because of his exhaustive knowledge of the *Quran* and *sharia*.³⁷ Fourth, he was al-Zawahiri's mentor and superior as both a physician and *jihadi* ideologue, which lends to their fierce competition, enmity, and dislike of each other. Finally, Sayyid Imam is one of the 100 top global thinkers of 2009 as selected by *Foreign Policy* – an award-winning and highly respected magazine on global politics, economics, and ideas. He was selected among such luminaries as President Barack Obama, General David Petraeus, and Bill Gates for writing revisions that condemn and undermine al-Qaeda's excessive violence and ideology. It is for these reasons that Sayyid Imam's work receives attention and respect in and outside of the *jihadi* community. These reasons are why Sayyid Imam's revisions can be used as a foundation to identify, amplify, and exploit the rift in al-Qaeda's ideology. As perhaps one of the most influential creators of *jihadi* ideology, Sayyid Imam is likely the best qualified to understand and develop the literature against Al-Qaeda, *mujahidin*, and violent extremists.

³⁵ COL Brian M. Drinkwine, "The Serpent in Our Garden: Al-Qa'ida and the Long War," *Strategic Studies Institute* (January 2009), 45. "[Sayyid Imam] is considered by Egyptians as one of the most influential *jihadi* thinkers alive and his previous books are considered core *jihadi* readings in the education of *mujahidin* worldwide."

³⁶ William McCants and Jarrett Brachman, *Militant Ideology Atlas: Executive Report* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2006), 6.

³⁷ Jarrett Brachman, "Al-Qaeda's Dissident," in *Foreign Policy*, Number 176, Special Issue 2009 (December 2009), 40. "...[Sayyid Imam] developed a reputation among the mujahideen as a serious jihadi scholar with an encyclopedic knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence."

Key Islamic Jurisprudence on *Jihad*

A review of classical Islamic jurisprudence provides the standards of Islamic teachings and codes that are recognized by the Muslim community worldwide. However, it is first critical to acknowledge that there are many different interpretations of *sharia*, Islamic codes and teachings.³⁸ The reason is that *mujahidin* such as al-Qaeda profess that there is only one interpretation – their version - of *sharia* or Islamic law. They argue that this single version of *sharia* or Islamic law is a single code that must be enforced as state law. The perpetuation of this falsehood strengthens al-Qaeda’s rationale to conduct and defend its interpretation and application of *sharia*. However, there are many different interpretations of *sharia* and instead of a single version, *sharia* is a diverse body of guidance for individual Muslims.³⁹ More appropriately, *sharia* may be defined as Islamic teachings or codes. In this context, the Islamic teachings and codes contained in classical Islamic jurisprudence is a more appropriate standard than the single version prescribed by al-Qaeda because the former, which acknowledges the diversity in the interpretations of *sharia*, is recognized by the Muslim community worldwide as the Islamic teachings or codes that guides them. This is what lends credibility to such classical Islamic jurisprudence such as Naqib al-Misri’s *Reliance of the Traveller* and Khadduri’s *War and Peace* in the law of Islam. The former is recognized by both the International Institute of Islamic Thought and the Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy while the latter is viewed as classical Islamic doctrine.

³⁸ John Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Volume 2, 450. “...*shari’ah* refers to God’s law in its quality as divine. Loosely used, it can indicate Islam, God’s religion. It refers to God’s law as it is with him or with his Prophet, or as it is contained (potentially) within the corpus of revelation.”

³⁹ George Readings, James Brandon, and Richard Phelps, “Islamism and Language: How Using the Wrong Words Reinforces Islamist Narratives,” 11, QuilliamFoundation.org, 2011, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/acatalog/books.html> (accessed April 1, 2011).

A potential critique from *mujahidin* such as al-Zawahiri is that classical Islamic jurisprudence is not from the *Quran*, *sunna*, or the first three generations of Islam as dictated by their *salafi* version of Islam.⁴⁰ The use of these sources may be problematic for *mujahidin* as they, despite their basis on classical Islamic doctrine, may be viewed as illegitimate since they include interpretations of Islamic thought that occurred after early Islam. As a result, the use of classical Islamic jurisprudence with its teachings and codes to guide is illegitimate and does not apply to al-Qaeda. However, this potential *mujahidin* argument is flawed for two reasons. First, al-Zawahiri uses later prominent *salafi* scholars after the early period, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, extensively in *Exoneration* to defend his arguments.⁴¹ Second, the classical Islamic jurisprudence in *Reliance of the Traveller* and *War and Peace in the Land of Islam* is widely accepted, respected, established, and acknowledged in the Muslim community worldwide. Consequently, the use of classical Islamic jurisprudence is a useful standard to identify Islamic code and teachings.

A review of Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* and Ayman al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration* reveals interpretations of Islamic sources – *Quran*, *hadith*, *sunna*, and the writings of *ulema* – that are quite distinct and are polar opposites in many cases. For example, Sayyid Imam argues that noncombatant non-Muslims in predominantly⁴² Muslim or non-Muslim countries are not allowed

⁴⁰ John Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), volume 3, 462. “*Salafi* is a reform movement...aimed at the renewal of Muslim life...used interchangeably with *islah* (reform) and *tajdid* (renewal)...derived from the Arabic root *salaf*, “to precede”...most Muslim scholars agree that the *salaf* comprise the first three generations of Muslims.”

⁴¹ Ayman al-Zawahiri, “Exoneration: A Treatise on the Exoneration of the Nation of the Pen and Sword of the Denigrating Charge of Being Irresolute and Weak,” Open Source Center Translation, Open Source Center (March 2008), <http://www.fas.org/irp/dni/osc/exoneration.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2009).

⁴² George Readings, James Brandon, and Richard Phelps, “Islamism and Language: How Using the Wrong Words Reinforces Islamist Narratives,” QuilliamFoundation.org, 2011, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/acatalog/books.html> (accessed April 1, 2011), 7. Use of the term “predominantly Muslim countries” is deliberately used because it is a more appropriate term to reflect the diversity of these countries as opposed to the *mujahidin* narrative which describes such countries as only Muslim.

to be killed while al-Zawahiri contends that it is permitted to kill them. A useful means to determine the validity of their respective interpretations would be to measure them against respected, established, and acknowledged sources of Islamic jurisprudence such as Majid Khadduri's *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* and Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri's *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*.

There are four primary teachings reflected in *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* that relates directly to Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* and al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration*. First the prescription for *jihad* is that it is enforced by the state and is a state instrument.⁴³ Al-Zawahiri denies that *jihad* is controlled or determined by the state as it is these same Muslim states against which he is declaring *jihad*. Sayyid Imam, on the other hand, argues that *jihad* must have the approval of Muslim rulers and Muslim states for *jihad* to be legitimate as prescribed in *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*. Second, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* relieves the requirement for *jihad* if the enemy is too powerful, which is later quantified when the enemy outnumbered the *jihadi* two to one.⁴⁴ Sayyid Imam addresses this issue in *Rationalizing Jihad* and is in agreement while al-Zawahiri calls for the use of all means possible to achieve their ends to include the use of asymmetric techniques to compensate for the significant difference and disproportionate number of personnel, equipment, and resources. Moreover, the classical Islamic doctrine in *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* identifies seven requirements to conduct *jihad* to include the *jihadi* must be male, a believer, a mature person, able-bodied, independent economically with no debt and can provide for his family, obtain the permission of his parents, have good intentions, and adhere to additional duties.⁴⁵ These additional duties include loyalty to their commander, honesty, avoidance of treacherous acts, and the prohibition of mutilation. Sayyid Imam adheres to all of

⁴³ Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2008), 60, 94.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 67, 135.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 106.

these prescriptions in *Rationalizing Jihad* while al-Zawahiri denies the majority of these prescriptions to include no debt, parental permission, avoidance of treacherous acts, and do not mutilate. In al-Zawahiri's interpretation, these prescriptions are not required because *mujahidin* must employ every means to achieve their ends. Finally, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* details prohibited acts in the conduct of *jihad*, which includes unnecessary destruction, the killing of noncombatants, and the killing of women and children.⁴⁶ Sayyid Imam's interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence in *Rationalizing Jihad* is in compliance with these prohibitions while al-Zawahiri justifies the use of any means to justify their ends to include killing women and children and destroying the United States and the West. While classical Islamic jurisprudence according to *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* does allow killing of women and children, it is permitted only under very specific circumstances. If *mujahidin* have besieged an enemy city and use area weapons such as catapults to target the enemy, the killing of women and children is justified.⁴⁷ While Sayyid Imam does not address this, al-Zawahiri uses this justification and reinterprets it for *mujahidin* to use in more general and common situations. For example, according to classical Islamic jurisprudence the 9/11 attacks are unjustified because women and children were killed. Moreover, the Twin Towers and Pentagon were not besieged by Muslim attackers. However, al-Zawahiri argues that the attacks were justified because the deaths of these women and children are a result of the *jihad* in the name of and in defense of Islam where the ends justify the means: "...the price is exorbitant for a worthwhile goal that deserves that price..."⁴⁸

The Islamic jurisprudence provided in *Reliance of the Traveller* provides four relevant points that contribute to the debate between Sayyid Imam and al-Zawahiri. First, classical

⁴⁶ Ibid., 102, 104.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁸ Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Exoneration: A Treatise on the Exoneration of the Nation of the Pen and Sword of the Denigrating Charge of Being Irresolute and Weak," Open Source Center Translation, Open Source Center (March 2008), <http://www.fas.org/irp/dni/osc/exoneration.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2009), 256.

Islamic jurisprudence does not require *jihad* if the opposing non-Muslim army is more than twice the size of the Muslim force.⁴⁹ Sayyid Imam addresses this issue over proportionality in *Rationalizing Jihad* when he outlines the requirements of *jihad* in which he states that to conduct *jihad*, victory must be attainable. Conversely, al-Zawahiri argues that *mujahidin* must use all means at their disposal – to include asymmetric ones – to achieve their ends. Second, classical Islamic jurisprudence identifies Muslims obligated to conduct *jihad* must not be in debt and have the permission of their parents.⁵⁰ Sayyid Imam advocates this ruling in *Rationalizing Jihad* when he identifies the requirements for *jihad* while al-Zawahiri denies that these conditions are not required to conduct *jihad*. Third, when addressing the rules of warfare, it is not permissible to kill women or children in *Reliance of the Traveller*.⁵¹ Once again, Sayyid Imam adheres to this requirement while al-Zawahiri's interpretation attempts to justify killing women and children in the conduct of *jihad*. Finally, in reference to the protection provided to non-Muslims in predominantly Muslim countries, Islamic jurisprudence stipulates that it is unlawful to kill a non-Muslim when he has been offered protection from Muslims, a formal agreement to protect Christians and Jews who are people of the book, and that the caliph is obligated to protect non-Muslims as he would Muslims while they are in Muslim lands.⁵² Sayyid Imam complies with these requirement in themes detailed previously on the prohibition to kill non-Muslims. Conversely, in al-Zawahiri's interpretation, non-Muslims are targets of *jihad* and he strongly argues that visas do not offer any protection so the death or harm to non-Muslims in Muslim lands is justified.

⁴⁹ Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2008), 607.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 602.

⁵¹ Ibid., 603.

⁵² Ibid., 603, 607, 609.

Both of these works of classical Islamic jurisprudence support the requirements and guidance to conduct *jihad* as presented by Sayyid Imam in *Rationalizing Jihad*. From the prohibition to kill innocent women and children to the call for nonviolence against Muslim rulers to the obligations of issuers and recipients of visas, Sayyid Imam's revisions of *jihadi* ideology are in compliance with classical Islamic jurisprudence. Al-Zawahiri, on the other hand, either abrogates or reinterprets Islamic jurisprudence as he justifies killing women and children, calls for violence against Muslim rulers, and argues that visas do not offer protection. Al-Zawahiri, and those who support his interpretation of *jihad*, justifies all of their actions and ideology on their struggle to defend Islam, which they believe is under siege by the U.S., West, and Israel. In this interpretation, widely accepted classical Islamic jurisprudence is ignored and reinterpreted in order to justify the deaths of innocents and the use of terror in the name of *jihad* and in defense of Islam. However, this interpretation has resulted in an inordinate amount of deaths – both Muslim and non-Muslim – and backlash from the Muslim community worldwide. The worldwide Muslim community strives to counter, condemn, and delegitimize the tactics, strategy, and ideology of al-Qaeda that condones and depends upon violence and terrorism to achieve its goals. This backlash has resulted in a significant loss of support to al-Qaeda because of the excessive violence their organization has caused, inspired, and wreaked. This is also demonstrated by the growing literature against al-Qaeda by both individuals and groups that were former *mujahidin* and well-respected Muslim scholars and leaders.

The analysis of the classical Islamic jurisprudence that applies to the argument between Sayyid Imam and al-Zawahiri provides an invaluable foundation for exploring the rift and challenges to al-Qaeda. This classical Islamic jurisprudence is respected, recognized, and acknowledged by the Muslim community worldwide. While there are many interpretations of *sharia*, this classical Islamic jurisprudence is accepted by the Muslim community worldwide and all schools of Islamic law – Maliki, Hanbali, Shafi'i, and Hanafi in which there is a consensus. The preceding analysis demonstrates that classical Islamic jurisprudence is in stark contrast to al-

Qaeda's interpretation, application, and ideology. Al-Qaeda violates the codes and teachings in classical Islamic jurisprudence by advocating killing women and children, neglecting the requirements for *jihad*, ignoring the prescription for proportionality with adversary, and promoting violence against Muslim states and leaders. In addition, this analysis establishes Sayyid Imam's revisions as reflecting the codes and teachings of classical Islamic jurisprudence. This analysis of key Islamic jurisprudence provides the foundation for an examination of the major themes in Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad*, al-Qaeda's response as demonstrated in al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration*, the responses of current and former *mujahidin*, and the five initiatives to counter, condemn, and delegitimize al-Qaeda and other violent extremists. Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* will be examined first because it provides the basis of the challenge to al-Qaeda and the deepening of the rift in al-Qaeda's ideology. This is accomplished through identifying and analyzing the seven major themes in his work.

Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad*

Sayyid Imam's argument in *Rationalizing Jihad* is that any violence committed in the name of and in defense of Islam is immoral according to the *Quran*, illegal under *sharia*, and prohibited under both. He accomplishes this in the course of approximately 111 pages divided into fifteen parts published in the winter of 2007 in the privately owned Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Masry al-Youm*, known for its objective news coverage.⁵³ The purpose of Sayyid Imam's document is to clarify Islamic rulings on the conditions, limits, and constraints related to *jihad*. There are seven primary themes in *Rationalizing Jihad* that Sayyid Imam uses to establish his argument that violence in the name of Islam is prohibited, illegal, and immoral according to

⁵³ Alexandra Sandels, "Al-Masry Al Youm English: New Kid on the Block in Egyptian Media," *Menassat*, (August 19, 2009): <http://www.menassat.com/?q=en/news-articles/7132-al-masry-al-youm-english-new-kid-block-egyptian-media> (accessed September 5, 2009).

Islam. These themes include the requirements to conduct *jihad*, the prohibition against killing Muslims and non-Muslims, ends do not justify means, no violence is permitted against Muslim states and rulers, the qualifications of religious authority, the obligations of recipients and issuers of visas, and recommendations. Through this argument, Sayyid Imam critically and convincingly disputes, denounces, and discredits the ideology, tactics, and strategy of violent extremists such as al-Qaeda.

Requirements to Conduct *Jihad*

A useful starting point to examine and analyze Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* are the requirements he identifies based on the *Quran*, *sharia*, and *hadith* for *jihad* to be waged. They are specific and clearly delineate the prerequisites to wage *jihad*. The requirements are so clear and specific that the conditions to wage *jihad* are quite limited and only possible when the conditions are unequivocal. These prerequisites may be outlined in five points. First, permission to conduct *jihad* is required from Muslim leaders, parents, and debtors.⁵⁴ Sayyid Imam identifies Muslim leaders as an *imam* or *emir* who are qualified and legitimate Islamic leaders unlike many current *mujahidin*. If a Muslim does not gain the permission from his a leader, he has reneged and betrayed his allegiance to Islam because other Muslims will pay the price and face the consequences of conducting illegitimate *jihad*. Moreover, *jihad* is prohibited if there is a risk or injury or death to one's self or another Muslim.⁵⁵ This prohibition is quite clear and is in stark contrast to the tactics and strategy embraced by al-Qaeda to conduct violence and employ terrorism. Third, to conduct *jihad* victory must be attainable. That is, a Muslim must know that victory is most likely or possible.⁵⁶ Sayyid Imam argues that this is not currently the case as

⁵⁴ Sayyid Imam, "Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World," Open Source Center, (December 3, 2007): Part 9, <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

⁵⁵ Ibid., Part 4, November 21, 2007.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

mujahidin are fighting government or state security forces that are disproportionately much more powerful. At the minimum, there should be equality in numbers and weapons, but this is not the case as these government or state security forces overwhelmingly have more resources than *mujahidin*. In addition, a safe base that provides *mujahidin* refuge in their efforts to conduct *jihad* must be available.⁵⁷ However, there are no safe bases since *mujahidin* are always under constant threat in areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Finally, a potential *mujahid* must be physically and financially capable to conduct *jihad* so if one is incapacitated, with debt, or unable to guarantee the welfare of his dependents, *jihad* cannot be conducted.⁵⁸ In addition, financial capability includes those financial resources that are gained from legitimate resources and not through burglary or abductions. If any of these requirements are lacking, *jihad* cannot be conducted under *sharia*.⁵⁹

Killing Muslims and Non-Muslims

While Sayyid Imam makes a distinction between killing Muslims and non-Muslims, he is adamant that killing anyone is against the principles of Islam, condemned in the *Quran*, and prohibited under *sharia*. To emphasize that killing is strictly prohibited according to the tenets of Islam, Sayyid Imam begins *Rationalizing Jihad* by proclaiming it is a violation of *sharia* to kill a Muslim or non-Muslim.⁶⁰ He begins with this argument against killing to establish the foundation that violence in the name of and in defense of Islam is strictly prohibited. Killing on the basis of nationality, denomination, or a person's hair or skin color is not allowed according to

⁵⁷ Ibid., Part 5, November 22, 2007.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Part 3, November 20, 2007.

⁵⁹ Sayyid Imam, "Rationalizing Jihad," Open Source Center (November 18, 2007), Part 5, <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009). "All these requirements are lacking, something which makes jihad incapable of leading to the desired result in upholding religion and promoting rule by *sharia*. This is the present reality in most countries, so most Islamic groups did not succeed in this despite the heavy sacrifices they provided."

⁶⁰ Ibid., Part 1, November 18, 2007.

Islam.⁶¹ Sayyid Imam emphasizes this point because *mujahidin* have used difference in nationality, denomination, or a person's hair or skin color to justify killing. Notable examples include al-Qaeda in Iraq's brutal campaign against the *Shi'a* community in Iraq and Usama bin Laden's *fatwas* exhorting Muslims to conduct *jihād* against Americans and the West and kill them. Sayyid Imam proclaims that those that kill commit a cardinal sin and betray Islam.⁶² In declaring this argument, Sayyid Imam definitively establishes that not only is the act of killing a sin, *mujahidin* betray their faith when they do. He comes to this conclusion because of the violent excesses of *mujahidin* such as al-Qaeda that has resulted in the death and murder of numerous innocent Muslims and non-Muslims.

Specific examples include his proclamation that it is not permissible to kill civilians in Muslim states and where the religion of potential victims is unknown.⁶³ A prominent example of why Sayyid Imam makes such an argument are the numerous innocent victims from violence that does not discriminate amongst its victims and all of the Muslims killed as a result of violence perpetrated by *mujahidin*. He emphasizes this point by explaining that it is a sin to blow up infrastructure such as buildings and public transportation in the name of God. He refers to the principles of Islam and argues that such acts committed in the name of God are not *jihād*. Another specific example of the prohibition is that killing non-combatant non-Muslims in Muslim countries is not permitted.⁶⁴ Foreigners who are not to be killed include those invited by Muslim states – such as workers - and tourists who visit Muslim countries. Sayyid Imam explains that a covenant is established when these foreigners stay in Muslim countries and they must be

⁶¹ Ibid., Part 1, November 18, 2007.

⁶² Ibid., Part 7, November 25, 2007.

⁶³ Ibid., Part 8, November 28, 2007.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Part 6, November 23, 2007.

protected and not killed. In addition, these foreigners should not be confronted, molested, injured, or robbed. To kill such foreigners is forbidden and a sin according to Sayyid Imam.

A salient point in Sayyid Imam's theme that prohibits killing is the Islamic concept of *tartarrus*. *Tartarrus* sanctions the killing of civilian or noncombatant Muslims used as human shields when they are in the way of a Muslim or *mujahidin* targeting an enemy. The concept of *tartarrus* removes any guilt from a perpetrator such as when *mujahidin* kill other Muslims because *mujahidin* do so in the course of *jihad* to remove the enemy. In this concept those innocent Muslims who die in the course of a *mujahidin* mission are martyrs who end up in heaven. A contemporary example is the death of innocent Iraqi Muslims from a roadside bomb or suicide bomber that was intended to kill or injure U.S. troops. According to *tartarrus*, those who set off the bomb are not guilty and the innocent Muslims who die from it are martyred because the purpose of the bomb was to continue the *jihad* to expel U.S. troops from Iraq and the bomb was intended for U.S. troops. However, Sayyid Imam argues that *tartarrus* cannot be used to justify killing anyone.⁶⁵ He adds that Muslims in non-Muslim countries cannot be killed based on *tartarrus*.⁶⁶ This is most likely a reference to attacks such as September 11 in New York in which indiscriminate violence by Muslims resulted in the deaths of Muslims. In attacks committed by groups such as al-Qaeda, numerous Muslims have been killed through indiscriminate and excessive violence. While such violence and terrorism has been committed in the name of Islam and *jihad* and rationalized by violent extremists such as al-Qaeda, it is strictly prohibited.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Part 5, November 22, 2007.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Part 7, November 25, 2007.

Ends Do Not Justify Means

Mujahidin are not mindless terrorists who kill, terrorize, and intimidate for the sake of violence. Instead, *mujahidin* use deliberate and calculated tactics and methods such as terrorism and martyrdom to achieve their ends. They have used these asymmetric tactics and methods to kill, terrorize, and intimidate to counter conventional military means. However, the means *mujahidin* have used has only resulted in the deaths of numerous civilians, especially noncombatant Muslims according to Sayyid Imam.⁶⁷ *Mujahidin* are quite aware of this with such deaths of noncombatant Muslims in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of violence perpetrated by *mujahidin* groups such as GI and EIJ to more recent brutal and barbaric attacks by al-Qaeda in Iraq in which al-Qaeda exponentially intensified the internecine violence between *Sunni* and *Shi'a* Muslims in Iraq. In this context, Sayyid Imam not only proclaims that the ends of *mujahidin* do not justify their means but that it is prohibited by the *Quran* and a violation of *sharia*. To emphasize this point, Sayyid Imam declares early in Part One of *Rationalizing Jihad* that ends do not justify means even if that end may be noble or legitimate.⁶⁸ Sayyid Imam argues that such ends have done more harm than good in light of all the Muslim killed or injured by *mujahidin* acts.⁶⁹

Sayyid Imam warns that when *mujahidin* use their ends to justify their means, they bring further or additional violence and misery upon themselves, the Muslim community worldwide, and their relatives. For example, while *mujahidin* may proclaim that the U.S. and West have committed numerous abuses and atrocities in Muslim lands, inflicting worse damage does not undo those abuses and atrocities.⁷⁰ Sayyid Imam refers to the *Quran* and *sharia* to argue that the

⁶⁷ Ibid., Part 1, November 18, 2007.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Part 1, November 18, 2007.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Part 3, November 20, 2007.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Part 5, November 22, 2007.

ends of *mujahidin* do not justify their means when *mujahidin* take revenge on those who they identify are enemies of God and Islam. He explains such acts are illegal in Islam because people other than the *mujahidin* themselves – often their families, dependents, and other Muslims - must deal with and suffer the consequences of the violence and terrorism perpetrated by *mujahidin*.⁷¹ He identifies consequences not only as death and destruction but also grief, hunger, more killing, revenge, imprisonment, and displacement.⁷² Consequently, he argues that perceived beneficial acts such as martyrdom can never be justified in Islam because it brings harm to other Muslims.⁷³ The main argument in this theme is that no matter how noble, honorable, or good the intentions of a *mujahidin* may be, violent means will never be justified. To underscore his argument, Sayyid Imam maintains that *mujahidin* that use violence to justify their ends are not religious, not conducting *jihad*, and not manly.⁷⁴

No Violence Against Muslim States and Rulers

Sayyid Imam argues that violence and clashes against Muslim states and rulers in the name of *jihad* is prohibited.⁷⁵ Examples of violence and clashes against Muslim states and rulers include rebellion and insurrection. While *mujahidin* rhetoric and operations focus on the U.S. and the West, there are also significant *mujahidin* initiatives to subvert, sabotage, delegitimize, and overthrow Muslim rulers and their governments. It is the stated objective of groups such as al-Qaeda to overthrow these governments and establish its version of Islamic law. Examples include al-Qaeda in Iraq, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and al-Qaeda in the Maghreb. However, Sayyid Imam asserts that such *mujahidin* efforts are prohibited because of the negative

⁷¹ Ibid., Part 15, December 26, 2007.

⁷² Ibid., Part 5, November 22, 2007.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Part 3, November 20, 2007.

consequences that result when attempting to overthrow or rebel against Muslim states and rulers. He explains that *jihad* against Muslim states and rulers is not a duty because of what he describes as the evil and negative consequences it entails. Negative consequences include destruction and damage upon these Muslim states and rulers and the deaths of Muslims.⁷⁶ He maintains that Muslims and *mujahidin* must respect treaties, honor agreements, and not clash with authorities.⁷⁷ Finally, he offers alternatives such as advocacy, forgiveness, patience, and civil disobedience to violence against Muslim states and their rulers.⁷⁸

Qualifications for Islamic Religious Authority

The fifth major theme of *Rationalizing Jihad* is determining the appropriate qualifications and eligibility for a Muslim to act as an authority on Islamic issues. Three prominent examples of religious rulings that require the input and judgment of a qualified Islamic religious authority include issuing a *fatwa*, declaring *jihad*, and accusing someone of *takfir*. *Takfir* is an especially serious and contentious issue because it is the accusation of an individual or group or declaration of one's self as an unbeliever or infidel. The gravity of this situation results in the pronouncement of the individual or group as an apostate that ultimately ends in their excommunication. Potential punishments include expulsion, amputation, or execution. All three examples are significant issues within Islam that have specific prescriptions that have evolved and have been clarified between the time of the Prophet and contemporary Islamic jurisprudence. Consequently, only qualified religious authorities can make rulings on *fatwas*, *jihad*, and *takfir*.

⁷⁶ Ibid., Part 5, November 22, 2007.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Part 9, December 3, 2007.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Part 5, November 22, 2007.

Sayyid Imam argues that in order for *mujahidin* to make judgments, they must be religiously qualified.⁷⁹ This entails extensive knowledge of the *Quran* and expertise with *sharia*. However, he asserts that violent extremists and many current *mujahidin* are not qualified Islamic religious authorities because they are not knowledgeable with the *Quran*, not experts of *sharia*, nor recognized authorities. For example, a *fatwa* can only be issued by a Muslim who is a recognized religious authority. This authority must be an expert with *sharia* to make such a declaration. Sayyid Imam warns that declaring *jihad*, accusing someone of *takfir*, and issuing a *fatwa* are very serious judgments that should not be taken lightly. He states that individual Muslims cannot punish the general public if they are believed to have violated Islamic rulings. It is not the duty of these individual Muslims but that of a recognized qualified religious authority. It is in this context Sayyid Imam criticizes and undermines al-Qaeda's authority as they have issued *fatwas*, declared *jihad*, and accused Muslims of *takfir* even if al-Qaeda is not a recognized qualified religious authority by the Muslim community worldwide. In addition, *mujahidin* like al-Qaeda indiscriminately accuse other Muslims of *takfir*, which Sayyid Imam maintains is unjust and not supported by legal evidence.⁸⁰ For a group or individual to be legitimately accused of *takfir*, extremely stringent evidence is required with an Islamic court or religious leader to pronounce a *fatwa* against the group or individual. In the case of *mujahidin* like al-Qaeda, this has not happened so their declarations and accusations are invalid and illegitimate.

Obligations of Issuers and Recipients of Visas

Sayyid Imam articulates that a visa is a mutual contract of safety and security that is to be respected by both issuer and recipient.⁸¹ This visa is provided by the issuer to allow the recipient

⁷⁹ Ibid., Part 2, November 19, 2007.

⁸⁰ Ibid., Part 10, November 23, 2007.

⁸¹ Ibid., Part 8, November 28, 2007.

to enter and reside in their country. Consequently, Sayyid Imam argues that any violation of this mutual contract is unethical and in violation of Islamic tenets. It is unethical and a violation because the Muslim betrays the trust of the country and his pledge. Muslims granted visas in non-Muslim countries are not permitted to betray these countries as it is not honorable to do so in a country that has allowed you to enter and reside with their people.⁸² In addition, the Muslim must respect blood and money that are inviolable according to the *Quran*.⁸³ Any violation of this pledge with the granting of a visa is a major sin that contravenes established Islamic belief.⁸⁴ This is likely to be in reference to *mujahidin* who live or travel to other countries – Muslim or non-Muslim – to incite or conduct violence or terrorism. These countries – whether it is the invitation of Mullah Omar of Usama bin Laden into Afghanistan or the 9/11 hijackers in the U.S. – allowed these Muslims to enter but these Muslims betrayed these countries’ trust by using them as a base to incite and conduct violence. Sayyid Imam argues that this betrayal is hypocrisy and a cardinal sin committed by *mujahidin*.

Recommendations

The seventh and final theme of *Rationalizing Jihad* is the recommendations of Sayyid Imam. His eight primary recommendations are to encourage Muslim preachers to facilitate the works of reforming *mujahidin*, reduce corruption in the world, improve religious education, eliminate unemployment, do not elect extremists, and appoint qualified and trustworthy leaders.⁸⁵ Seventh, Sayyid Imam recommends non-Muslim states to stop intimidating, provoking, and destroying Muslim countries.⁸⁶ He asserts that if non-Muslim countries continue to do so,

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., Part 7, November 25, 2007.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Part 6, November 23, 2007.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Part 14, December 20, 2007.

⁸⁶ Ibid., Part 15, December 26, 2007.

Muslims have the right to defend themselves and will respond in kind. Eighth, he exhorts Islamic groups to make their leaders accountable for their mistakes. He states some *mujahidin* are not legitimate leaders because they have no military experience, claim leadership after imprisonment, and never blame themselves. While Sayyid Imam does not identify these leaders, this criticism is likely a reference to al-Zawahiri as he characterizes these three descriptions. Sayyid Imam's assertion is critical because he attributes the misinterpretation of the *Quran*, violations of *sharia*, and unequal military confrontations to such leaders.⁸⁷ In fact, Sayyid Imam calls on Muslims not to obey an order if they do not think it is legitimate especially if the leader is unqualified and has little knowledge in Islamic jurisprudence.⁸⁸ In addition, he appeals for Muslims to use their minds when *mujahidin* leaders incite other Muslims in the safety of intelligence services, a cave, tribes, or political asylum. Once again without mentioning names, this is likely Sayyid Imam's criticism of such leaders as Usama bin Laden and al-Zawahiri who are known to lack credibility in the fields of Islamic scholarship and jurisprudence and are not fighting on the physical battlefield while they exhort others to do so even if they are safe and out of harm's way.

The analysis of Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* provides an example of a challenge from the Muslim community to al-Qaeda and other violent extremists. In addition, it demonstrates the rift that is deepening within al-Qaeda and its *jihadi* ideology with the growing revisionist literature from such Muslims as Sayyid Imam. In this ideological rift and challenge, Sayyid Imam and al-Zawahiri disagree over the application of Islamic law, code, teachings, and doctrine to conduct *jihad*. This rift began with the revisions and subsequent renunciation of violence by such Egyptian *jihadi* groups such as GI. More recently, the rift has deepened as a result of the revisions from current and former members of EIJ and now most recently the former

⁸⁷ Ibid., Part 5, November 22, 2007.

⁸⁸ Ibid., Part 12, December 17, 2007.

leader and member of EIJ, Sayyid Imam. Since EIJ and Sayyid Imam were instrumental in the formation of al-Qaeda, the development of its *jihadi* ideology, and their influence amongst *mujahidin*, these revisions present a formidable threat to the legitimacy of violent extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates. Finally, this analysis provides the foundation with which to examine the response from al-Zawahiri in his *Exoneration*. While al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration* has seventeen chapters, each of his chapters roughly corresponds to Sayyid Imam's fifteen parts in *Rationalizing Jihad*. In addition, minus *Rationalizing Jihad*'s recommendation theme, al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration* reflects all of Sayyid Imam's six other themes which includes the requirements to conduct *jihad*, killing Muslims and non-Muslims, ends justifying means, violence against Muslim rulers and states, qualifications for Islamic religious authorities, and obligations for issuers and recipients of visas. In al-Zawahiri's response to Sayyid Imam, *Exoneration* attempts to counter *Rationalizing Jihad* point-by-point, part-by-part, and theme-by-theme. Consequently, al-Zawahiri, who represents al-Qaeda, condones killing, exhorts Muslims to rebel against their leaders and governments, argues that ends justify means, either reduces or renders unclear the qualifications for Islamic religious authority, and removes obligations such as protection for non-Muslims with visas in Muslim countries.

Ayman al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration* – A Response to *Rationalizing Jihad*

Within three months of the publication of Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad*, al-Zawahiri published his response entitled *Exoneration: A Treatise on Exonerating of the Nation of the Pen and the Sword of the Denigrating Charge of Being Irresolute and Weak*. *Exoneration* is a comprehensive attempt to respond to Sayyid Imam's revisions. *Exoneration* is composed of seventeen chapters that closely mirror Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* in which al-Zawahiri addresses each of the fifteen parts of the work. As the title suggests, al-Zawahiri believes the revisions in *Rationalizing Jihad* renders the *mujahidin* and their *jihad* impotent, weak, and filled

with self-doubt. Al-Zawahiri's response is significant for three reasons. First, the depth and magnitude of al-Zawahiri's response resulted in a treatise of more than 250 pages. Al-Zawahiri attempts to refute each of the fifteen parts of *Rationalizing Jihad*. Second, the speed of his immediate response – a three-month turnaround - indicates al-Zawahiri was compelled to respond as soon as possible because Sayyid Imam's revision's seriously questioned and threatened the legitimacy of al-Qaeda's ideology that could erode support for al-Qaeda. Finally, while there have been numerous attacks on al-Qaeda's ideology, *Exoneration* is al-Zawahiri's only detailed written response to these attacks. The primary reasons for the detailed and immediate response from al-Zawahiri includes the instrumental role Sayyid Imam played in the development of al-Qaeda and Sayyid Imam's respected position as an influential contributor to *jihadi* literature and ideology. In addition, *Rationalizing Jihad* presents a formidable challenge to al-Qaeda's ideology not only because it was written by Sayyid Imam but also the breadth and depth of sources used in *Rationalizing Jihad* from the *Quran*, *hadith*, and *sunna*. Finally, al-Zawahiri was likely compelled to write an extensive response as soon as possible because of his personal enmity for Sayyid Imam. To emphasize the importance and magnitude of al-Zawahiri's need to provide a response, he describes *Exoneration* as "...one of the most difficult things that I have written in my life."⁸⁹ Al-Zawahiri's response to *Rationalizing Jihad* has two major arguments and six primary themes that endeavor to refute Sayyid Imam's revisions of *jihadi* ideology.

There are two major arguments in *Exoneration* that form the basis of al-Zawahiri's refutation of *Rationalizing Jihad*. First, al-Zawahiri claims that Sayyid Imam's aim in writing *Rationalizing Jihad* is to end *jihad* and any resistance to those entities which *jihad* strives to eliminate which includes what he describe as "Crusaders" such as the U.S., Israel, and the West

⁸⁹ Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Exoneration: A Treatise on the Exoneration of the Nation of the Pen and Sword of the Denigrating Charge of Being Irresolute and Weak," Open Source Center Translation, Open Source Center (March 2008), <http://www.fas.org/irp/dni/osc/exoneration.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2009), 2.

and “puppet regimes” which include repressive Muslim regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.⁹⁰ Al-Zawahiri uses many terms to describe what he assesses is Sayyid Imam’s aim to weaken *jihad* to include to restrict⁹¹, destroy⁹², and discourage⁹³ *jihad*. In al-Zawahiri’s point of view, Sayyid Imam’s version of *jihad* weakens the efforts of *mujahidin* to an extent that *jihad* is impotent and *mujahidin* suffer from self-doubt, low self-esteem, defeatism, and humiliation. This argument is demonstrated in al-Zawahiri’s statement that, “...It is not a document of “rationalizing jihad” but a document of restricting and stopping jihad and bringing it to its knees”.⁹⁴

The second argument is al-Zawahiri’s assertion that *Rationalizing Jihad* was strongly influenced and likely written by the “Crusaders” and “puppet regimes” he describes above. Al-Zawahiri refers to *Rationalizing Jihad* as a product of “Jews and Crusaders”^{95, 96} and the security services of Egypt such as the State Security Service and the U.S.’s Central Intelligence Agency.⁹⁷ He contends *Rationalizing Jihad* was written under the direction, supervision, and financing of all of these entities and possibly was not even written by Sayyid Imam.⁹⁸ In fact al-Zawahiri asserts that if Sayyid Imam did in fact write *Rationalizing Jihad*, he was coerced to write these revisions under pressure from all of these entities. According to al-Zawahiri, this coercion is a result of torture and intimidation coupled with promises and benefits. Consequently, al-Zawahiri, like other writers who condemn *Rationalizing Jihad*, maintain that the revisions are a product of

⁹⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁹¹ Ibid., 13.

⁹² Ibid., 15.

⁹³ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 114.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 77.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 73.

prison and incarceration so it cannot be trusted. An analysis of *Exoneration* indicates that there are six major themes al-Zawahiri argues to refute the revisions in *Rationalizing Jihad*.

Requirements to Conduct *Jihad*

Al-Zawahiri argues that it is every Muslim's individual obligation to conduct *jihad*⁹⁹ and it is a communal duty because of the defensive *jihad* Muslims must wage against those attempting to destroy Islam.¹⁰⁰ He identifies the U.S. as the leader of the nations attempting to destroy Islam because of what al-Zawahiri describes as the U.S. fight against Islam, its occupation of Muslim countries, its assault against Muslims, its support of Jews, and its insults against Islam.¹⁰¹ Arguing that *ulema* or Islamic scholars unanimously agree that *jihad* is to be conducted as an obligation, Al-Zawahiri identifies the three conditions in which *jihad* must be waged which includes an *imam* or Islamic leader's call for war, if Muslims have been mobilized for war, and if an enemy enters Muslim territory.¹⁰² Since the current *jihad* is defensive – using the 9/11 Commission Report to support his argument that the U.S. is attacking Islam - Muslims do not have to request the permission of their parents, creditors, or *emir* (commander or leader).¹⁰³

Al-Zawahiri's interpretation of the requirements or prerequisites to conduct *jihad* are in stark contrast to the five major points described by Sayyid Imam because al-Zawahiri views the current conflict as a defensive *jihad*. To emphasize this point, al-Zawahiri identifies the United States as the greatest enemy of Islam and must defend itself against it.¹⁰⁴ Al-Zawahiri refers to

⁹⁹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 244-5.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰² Ibid., 46.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 234.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 195.

what he interprets as oppression by the United States of Muslims such as Palestinians killed in Gaza and the deaths of one million Iraqi children.¹⁰⁵ In addition, in chapter fifteen, al-Zawahiri identifies forty-nine points from the 9/11 Commission Report in which he lists U.S. attacks and aggression against Muslims. Using these examples, al-Zawahiri attempts to justify the call for *jihad* against the United States referring to the four schools of Islamic religious law – Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafi’i – that calls for invaders to be repelled.¹⁰⁶ Also, as a result of the perceived attack on Islam, al-Zawahiri calls for retribution against the United States when he states, “...we do to the infidels what they have done to us...”.¹⁰⁷ In this context, al-Zawahiri argues that the requirements to conduct *jihad* as explained by Sayyid Imam are invalidated because the priority of *jihad* is to defend Islam. To further emphasize his point that all Muslims must conduct *jihad*, even those who Sayyid Imam identifies as too weak to conduct *jihad* must at least continue to prepare for *jihad* according to al-Zawahiri’s interpretation.¹⁰⁸

Killing Innocents is Justified

Al-Zawahiri contends that killing innocent people is permitted and justified in Islam.¹⁰⁹ He uses examples from the *Quran* and interpretations from *ulema* or Islamic scholars to justify that the killing of innocent people is permitted in Islam.¹¹⁰ He identifies innocent people as women, children, and other Muslims. Notable *ulema* al-Zawahiri cites includes Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qudamah, Abu Hanifa, and Ibn Qasim using their *fatwas* and interpretations of the *Quran* to justify the killing of innocents. Al-Zawahiri asserts that these innocents may be killed even when

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 93, 95.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Chapters VIII and IX.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 40, 157.

they are being used as human shields as described in *tartarrus*.¹¹¹ In essence, al-Zawahiri attempts to justify the indiscriminate killing that has become a hallmark of al-Qaeda's terrorist tactics. His rationale is that it may be necessary to kill women and children out of necessity in the course of *jihad*. In addition, as long as the deaths of these women and children are not intentional, their deaths during the course of *jihad* are permitted.¹¹² Al-Zawahiri uses the example in the *Quran* in which catapults – an area weapon that is not accurate – were used to bombard the enemies of the Prophet Muhammad in Al-Ta'if in his effort to besiege his non-Muslim enemy. While the Prophet intended to kill his enemy, there were innocent women and children. As an area weapon, the catapult could not be accurately employed to kill only the enemies of the Prophet Muhammad and separate them from the women and children. Consequently, al-Zawahiri and these *ulema* contend that since the Prophet Muhammad still employed catapults knowing there were innocent women and children and that they were not intentionally targeted, the killing of innocents is justified. In the case of Muslims killed who were not intentionally targeted or were human shields as in *tartarrus*, al-Zawahiri claims these Muslims became martyrs.¹¹³

It is ironic that al-Zawahiri begins *Exoneration* by asking the author of *Rationalizing Jihad*, Sayyid Imam, for examples of when al-Qaeda has killed innocent people¹¹⁴ because later on in *Exoneration* al-Zawahiri goes to significant lengths as evidenced above to provide a rationale for the justification of killing innocents. While al-Zawahiri argues for the justification for the killing of innocents, he fails to adequately acknowledge that it is precisely the death of innocents and fellow Muslims that has caused the increasingly growing sentiment against al-

¹¹¹ Ibid., 40.

¹¹² Ibid., 184.

¹¹³ Ibid., 164.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 25.

Qaeda. This is no better demonstrated than when al-Zawahiri attempts to rationalize the death of a young schoolgirl named Shayma Abdel-Halim. She was inadvertently killed when EIJ members ordered by al-Zawahiri attempted to kill Egyptian Prime Minister Atef Sidqi on November 1993.¹¹⁵ There was a significant backlash against *mujahidin* that significantly damaged their reputation as a result of the death of Shayma Abdel-Halim described as the “Shayma Effect.”¹¹⁶ Despite this, al-Zawahiri still attempts to rationalize the death of innocents and of Shayma in *Exoneration* explaining that he and EIJ had no choice and that it was unintentional.¹¹⁷

Ends Justify Means

Al-Zawahiri contends that the ends justify the means in his interpretation of *jihad*. He uses this argument to explain and justify why *mujahidin* take certain actions. For example, to demonstrate that *mujahidin* must use any means to achieve their ends, al-Zawahiri declares, “...the price is exorbitant for a worthwhile goal that deserves that price.”¹¹⁸ To further justify his position, al-Zawahiri explains that Muslims can use any means to respond to aggression committed against them and must respond in kind.¹¹⁹ He maintains that if Muslims are attacked, they can respond in an equivalent manner so if the enemy uses a sword to kill a Muslim can use

¹¹⁵ Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 211.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 211 and Jarrett M. Brachman and William F. McCants, *Stealing Al-Qa’idas Playbook* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2006), 11.

¹¹⁷ Ayman al-Zawahiri, “Exoneration: A Treatise on the Exoneration of the Nation of the Pen and Sword of the Denigrating Charge of Being Irresolute and Weak,” Open Source Center Translation, Open Source Center (March 2008), <http://www.fas.org/irp/dni/osc/exoneration.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2009), 260.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 256.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 173.

the same. He states that "...we do to the infidels what they have done to us..."¹²⁰ to explain why the 9/11 attacks were justified in response to such attacks as the U.S. bombing of Sudan in 1998. He explains that the aggression committed by the United States against Muslims justifies Muslim aggression against the United States as a form of retribution. Al-Zawahiri goes so far as to claim that since vengeance is based on equivalence, Muslims may mutilate the bodies of non-Muslims if they are attacked.¹²¹ Al-Zawahiri also uses this theme on ends justifying means to rationalize and defend the killing of innocents. What is ironic is that while al-Zawahiri proclaims the use of any means to achieve their ends, he cites a quote from Ibn Taymiyyah that negates his argument in the same chapter he calls for vengeance, retribution, and mutilation: "Do not exceed the bounds, do not act treacherously, do not mutilate, and do not kill children."¹²²

Violence and Insurrection Against Muslim Rulers

Al-Zawahiri declares that it is the duty of all Muslims to oppose what he describes as unjust rulers.¹²³ He describes unjust rulers as those Muslim rulers who do not rule by *sharia* as the basis of their governance and those who support and are loyal to the enemies of Islam, namely the U.S., the West, and Israel. Al-Zawahiri labels these Muslim rulers as corrupt puppet rulers who are apostates. He maintains that guidance from the *Quran*, the *sunna*, the *ulema*, and their *fatwas* prove that these rulers are apostates.¹²⁴ Since these Muslim rulers are apostates, it is the obligation of every Muslim to remove them.¹²⁵ In fact, he states it is a requirement for all Muslims to fight these Muslim rulers and their regimes, to conduct a rebellion against them, and

¹²⁰ Ibid., 41.

¹²¹ Ibid., 174.

¹²² Ibid., 175.

¹²³ Ibid., 110.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 81.

kill them because these apostate Muslim rulers are combatants.¹²⁶ Al-Zawahiri believes Muslims should strive by all possible means, including military confrontation, to remove what he has labeled as apostate regimes. Curiously absent from al-Zawahiri's argument are the citations from the *Quran*, the *sunna* to support his exhortation for Muslims to rebel against Muslim rulers because he uses the entire gamut of Islamic literature to defend his other points in *Exoneration*.

Qualifications for Islamic Religious Authority

Al-Zawahiri claims that only Muslims with knowledge of the *sharia* and experience on the battlefield are qualified religious authorities.¹²⁷ While al-Zawahiri does not explain the expertise required of *sharia* to be a qualified religious authority, he is clear on his assertion that a qualified religious authority is one who has waged *jihad* in the battlefields. To make this argument, al-Zawahiri questions Sayyid Imam's religious authority and background. First, al-Zawahiri states that Sayyid Imam himself admitted that he is not a *mufti* or Islamic scholar and, as a result, *Rationalizing Jihad* is not a *fatwa*.¹²⁸ Second, al-Zawahiri questions Sayyid Imam's ability to assess or determine who is a religious authority on *jihad* because Sayyid Imam has been incarcerated for the past six years, abandoned *jihad* fifteen years ago, and has not been on the battlefield waging *jihad*.¹²⁹ Al-Zawahiri alleges Sayyid Imam has no battlefield experience and thus is not a qualified religious authority. Using this interpretation, al-Zawahiri contends that Sayyid Imam is not an Islamic religious authority and thus cannot judge, address, evaluate, or guide *jihad*.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 76.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 76.

A problem with al-Zawahiri's contention that only Muslims with knowledge of the *sharia* are qualified religious authorities is that he does not define how much or what kind knowledge and expertise they should have. This opens up the possibility that any Muslim can be a religious authority. In addition, another issue is that al-Zawahiri argues that only those who have been on the battlefield of *jihad* can be a qualified religious authority and claims Sayyid Imam cannot be a qualified religious authority. However, al-Zawahiri fails to acknowledge that Sayyid Imam was a *mujahidin* who fought the *jihad* against the Soviets in the 1980s, Sayyid Imam helped found al-Qaeda, and Sayyid Imam lived in the forefront of the *mujahidin* battlefields of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Al-Zawahiri's credibility with the issue of waging *jihad* on the battlefield is in question as he himself has not been on this physical battlefield. Al-Zawahiri exhorts others to do conduct *jihad* on the battlefield as he hides in a cave or safe area while those he exhorts risk their life and limb on the physical battlefield. Another issue is that while al-Zawahiri does not initially refer to *Rationalizing Jihad* as a *fatwa*, he does so later in *Exoneration*, which puts into question al-Zawahiri's consistency.¹³⁰ Finally, an additional example of al-Zawahiri's lack of consistency in establishing religious qualifications is that when he identifies twenty-one *ulema* who have contributed to *jihad* in the third chapter of *Exoneration*, one of these *ulema* is Sayyid Imam who al-Zawahiri identifies as "Shaykh Abd-al-Qadir bin-Abd-al-Aziz", the man he is attempting to contradict and delegitimize.¹³¹

Obligations of Issuers and Recipients of Visas

Al-Zawahiri insists that visa obligations for Muslims and protections for non-Muslim visitors do not apply to Muslims and Muslim countries. This is in stark contrast to the view of Sayyid Imam who argues that non-Muslims are offered safe conduct while in Muslim

¹³⁰ Ibid., 78.

¹³¹ Ibid., 55.

countries.¹³² In addition, Sayyid Imam emphasizes the sanctity of Muslims provided visas to visit non-Muslim countries. This is likely a direct reference to the 9/11 attackers who entered the United States with visas and betrayed the United States through the attack and other Muslims who have conducted or plan to conduct attacks in other countries. Al-Zawahiri's interpretation of visas is the polar opposite from that of Sayyid Imam. Al-Zawahiri asserts that these visa obligations do not apply to Muslims because they are not subject to the non-Islamic laws that govern them. In addition, he claims that visas do not provide non-Muslims with *aman* or safe conduct and protection while in Muslim countries.

It is ironic that al-Zawahiri would use the definition of a visa from Western sources¹³³ – the Encyclopedia Britannica and Encarta Encyclopedia – to form the basis of his argument that visas do not provide any guarantee for protection for those who possess them as they are merely documents that allow nonresidents to enter in light of his enmity for the West. In fact, al-Zawahiri interprets that there is no explicit promise of safety in the Islamic idea of *aman*¹³⁴ and that visas should not hinder any *jihadi* efforts to harm the United States.¹³⁵ Al-Zawahiri attempts to strengthen his interpretation by claiming that even the United States does not honor visas as Muslims in America are treated poorly and others have been kidnapped and incarcerated at Guantanamo.¹³⁶ Consequently, al-Zawahiri concludes that visas do not guarantee the safety of non-Muslims in Muslim lands. In addition, al-Zawahiri emphasizes that non-Muslims are not

¹³² Sayyid Imam, "Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World," Open Source Center, (November 23 and 25, 2007): Parts 6 and 7, <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

¹³³ Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Exoneration: A Treatise on the Exoneration of the Nation of the Pen and Sword of the Denigrating Charge of Being Irresolute and Weak," Open Source Center Translation, Open Source Center (March 2008), <http://www.fas.org/irp/dni/osc/exoneration.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2009), 119.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 198.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 118.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 122-123.

offered protection while in Muslim countries because it is permissible to kill or kidnap non-Muslims in the name of Islam while conducting *jihad*.¹³⁷ Al-Zawahiri believes that these non-Muslims can be killed because they may be from countries that are enemies of Islam and thus are legitimate targets in *jihad*.

Al-Zawahiri attempts to counter, condemn, and discredit Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* in his lengthy treatise, *Exoneration*. Al-Zawahiri's aim is to defend al-Qaeda and its affiliates and justify their actions through their interpretation of Islamic law, codes, and teachings. He attempts to make two major arguments to delegitimize *Rationalizing Jihad* arguing first that it was written to weaken the resolve of *mujahidin* and second that it was strongly influenced and thus corrupted by the state security agencies of both Egypt and the U.S. Al-Zawahiri then endeavors to counter six of the major themes of *Rationalizing Jihad* through his interpretation of Islamic law, codes, and teachings. However, al-Zawahiri's attempt to counter Sayyid Imam reflects the weaknesses in his interpretation of Islamic law, codes, teachings, and doctrine in two primary ways. First, his interpretations are contrary to the classical Islamic jurisprudence that is widely accepted, respected, and acknowledged by the Muslim community worldwide. In fact, Sayyid Imam, in his effort to counter, condemn, and discredit al-Qaeda and other violent extremists, interprets Islamic codes, teachings, and doctrine as prescribed in classical Islamic jurisprudence. Consequently this lends strength to Sayyid Imam's argument and weakens that of al-Zawahiri. Second, the weakness in al-Zawahiri's interpretation is demonstrated by the global condemnation by both the non-Muslim and Muslim community of the use of violence by al-Qaeda and other violent extremists. As a result, no matter how much he, al-Qaeda, and other *mujahidin* defend their use of violence, they will continue to be condemned by the majority of Muslims worldwide.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 181.

Al-Zawahiri's response further deepens the rift between al-Qaeda and the growing number of *mujahidin*, primarily those from GI and EIJ who significantly influenced al-Qaeda, who have revised their *jihadi* ideology and renounced violence. Sayyid Imam simply represents the ongoing trend of former *mujahidin*, such as those from Egyptian *mujahidin* groups like GI and EIJ, to revise their ideology and renounce violence. The significance of Sayyid Imam in this growing revisionism among *mujahidin* is that he is a very influential figure in both al-Qaeda and *jihadi* ideology for his role in creating the organization and his critical role in developing its ideology. The scope of al-Zawahiri's response in *Exoneration* demonstrates the significance of Sayyid Imam and *Rationalizing Jihad*. However, the rift has deepened with the subsequent responses from numerous former and current *mujahidin*. These subsequent responses from former and current *mujahidin* vary from support for Sayyid Imam's revisions to outright condemnation of them. While the content of their reactions are critical, the dialog and arguments Sayyid Imam's revisions has created within the *mujahidin* community serves to deepen the rift between al-Qaeda and *mujahidin* that have revised their violent extremist ideology and renounced violence. The next part of this monograph details nine reactions to *Rationalizing Jihad*. Of these nine reactions, three are in support of Sayyid Imam's revisions while the remaining six disagree with them. These nine reactions were selected because of the influence of their authors. These authors include such al-Qaeda luminaries as Abu Yahya al-Libi believed to be the heir to Usama bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, Muhammad al-Hakaymah the now deceased former head of al-Qaeda's propaganda efforts, and Abu Basir al-Tartusi a leading *jihadi* ideologue. These reactions demonstrate that there is a debate between leaders of *mujahidin* which represents a rift in their ideology which should be amplified and exploited as an example of the growing challenge from within the Muslim community.

Reactions¹³⁸ to *Rationalizing Jihad*

Even before Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* was published in *Al-Masry al-Youm*, copies of his work were distributed to numerous current and former *mujahidin*. As a result, six of the nine reactions were written during an eleven-day time span between the nineteenth and twenty-ninth of November in 2007. These six reactions written within an eleven-day period include those from Hana al-Sibai, Muhammad Khalil al-Hakaymah, Husayn Bin-Mahmud, Abu-Basir al-Tartusi, Usamah Ayyub, and Usama Rushdi. The response from Abu Yahya al-Libi came in an interview in September 10, 2007 – two months prior to the publication of *Rationalizing Jihad* – as it is likely Abu Yahya al-Libi was aware of the revisions that were being written by incarcerated EIJ *mujahidin* led by its former leader, Sayyid Imam. The immediate responses from these current and former *mujahidin* leaders indicate the controversy over the significance of Sayyid Imam's revisions. It is likely that the numerous responses both in support of and against Sayyid Imam's revisions prompted al-Zawahiri to write *Exoneration*. The first six reactions represent the response that contradict and condemn Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* to include Hana al-Sibai, Abu Yahya al-Libi, Adil Abd-al-Majid Abd-al-Bari, Muhammad Khalil Al-Hakaymah, Abu-Basir al-Tartusi, and Husayn bin-Mahmud. All six of these authors are current members of al-Qaeda or EIJ. These reactions that contradict and condemn *Rationalizing Jihad* question the legitimacy of Sayyid Imam's revisions because they were written in prison where they believed he was likely coerced by state security services. In addition, these authors condemn Sayyid Imam for their belief of his failure to properly interpret Islamic laws, codes, and teachings. The remaining three reactions support Sayyid Imam's revisions to include Hamid al-Ali, Usamah Ayyub, and Usama Rushdi. The latter two authors are former *mujahidin* while

¹³⁸ All of these articles were downloaded from the Open Source Center website. As a result, there are no pages listed for these articles. For these nine reactions, the footnote will only indicate the source author, title, translator, and date but not the page number.

Hamid al-Ali, is an influential *jihadi* ideologue that has been critical of al-Qaeda. These authors support Sayyid Imam's revisions because they argue that these revisions are necessary in order to stop the excessive violence of violent extremists such as al-Qaeda. In addition, these authors point to the revisionist trend amongst *mujahidin* from GI and EIJ and the need to follow the laws, codes, and teachings of Islam because violent extremists such as al-Qaeda have misinterpreted and misapplied Islam.

Hana al-Sibai – an Egyptian *Jihadi* Living in London as a Political Refugee

Hani al-Sibai is an Egyptian *jihadi* scholar and defense lawyer who currently resides in the United Kingdom as a political refugee. His support and involvement with EIJ and violent extremists resulted in his conviction in Egypt. An evaluation of his response is relevant as he remains an influential voice in *jihad* and is still a dangerous figure as demonstrated by his addition to a United Nations list of banned individuals as a person or entity associated with al-Qaeda. He currently is the head of the London-based Al-Maqrizi Center for Historical Studies and in 2005 he appeared in al-Jazeera to support al-Qaeda's attacks on 9/11.

Hani al-Sibai, despite his admission and description of Sayyid Imam as a great theologian, has been one of the most vocal critics of *Rationalizing Jihad*. Hani al-Sibai's arguments against Sayyid Imam's revisions focus on six issues. First, Hani al-Sibai questions the legitimacy of the revisions written in prison describing them as "children of iron bars" and that not only could these revisions be a result of duress but also enticements such as a reduction in sentence, improvement of conditions, family visits, or possible release. Second, Hani al-Sibai claims that Sayyid Imam wrote these revisions because of pressure from the Egyptian intelligence services, what he describes as the "state security apparatus", which provided analysts to support the revisions. Third, Hani al-Sibai questions the timing of the release of these revisions asking why Sayyid Imam wrote them while in prison and not prior when Sayyid Imam was imprisoned

in Yemen in 2003. Fourth, Hani al-Sibai asserts that the only religious leaders that should be trusted are those on the frontline in the battle of *jihad*. This is an attempt to discredit Sayyid Imam who is currently incarcerated. Fifth, Hani al-Sibai challenges Sayyid Imam's argument that *mujahidin* have abused the concept of *tartarrus* (that one is not guilty if you kill a noncombatant, human shield, or Muslim while targeting an enemy) to kill innocent people. Sixth, Hani al-Sibai refutes Sayyid Imam's claim that *mujahidin* have attacked people based on their nationality, race, or sectarian affiliation. Hani al-Sibai concludes that these issues result in the revision's lack of credibility and minimal impact on *mujahidin* around the world.¹³⁹

Abu Yahya al-Libi – al-Qaeda Leader and Scholar and Heir Apparent to UBL

Abu Yahya al-Libi is a Libyan Islamic scholar and a high-ranking leader within al-Qaeda as its director of jurisprudence committee. He is widely believed to be the frontrunner to lead al-Qaeda when Usama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri pass away. Unlike the latter, Abu Yahya al-Libi is well respected for his exceptional knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence which he uses to skillfully justify terrorism. In addition to his reputation as an Islamic scholar, Abu Yahya al-Libi is well versed with the use of media and its role in promoting the global message of *jihad*. What has likely added most to his status was his escape from the detention facility of Bagram Airfield on July 10, 2005.

One noticeable hallmark of Abu Yahya al Libi's response is that he never mentions Sayyid Imam by name but refers to the revisions simply as retractions. It is likely that he did not read Sayyid Imam's revisions but it is highly probable that he is well versed with the revisionist

¹³⁹ Hani al-Sibai, "Report on Reaction to al-Jihad Revisions by Islamists Residing in London," Open Source Center (November 23, 2007). <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

trend in *jihadi* ideology and the Sayyid Imam's revisions as there were reports Sayyid Imam was writing these revisions in the summer of 2007. Abu Yahya al-Libi's criticism focuses on five themes. First, Abu Yahya al-Libi argues that the retractions were a product of what he describes as pressure, coercion, and blackmail of state security forces on Sayyid Imam. Instead, Abu Yahya al-Libi asks to wait until "the one who proposed them" is able to speak freely. Abu Yahya al-Libi quotes the *Quran* to warn the writer that he faces *Allah's* wrath and a dreadful penalty if he writes "Unbelief" or lies in his retractions. Moreover, he argues that the revisions are a product of the Egypt's State Security Services, what he describes as "Egyptian security organs." That is, these organizations wrote the retractions. Third, Abu Yahya al-Libi claims only God can judge in response to the lessons learned from the retractions. Furthermore, he contends the retractions are a product of the "Crusaders" led by the United States as part of its war of ideas against *jihad*. Finally, he denies al-Qaeda and the *mujahidin* call for the death of anyone who leaves *jihad* and rejects the claim that al-Qaeda views nations as infidels. It is interesting that Abu Yahya al-Libi makes this argument as one of the primary tenets of al-Qaeda is death to anyone accused of *takfir*, the excommunication of one Muslim by another. Al-Qaeda uses this rationale to justify killing a Muslim because he is declared an apostate when accused of *takfir*. Abu Yahya al-Libi concludes by challenging anyone to identify in al-Qaeda's constitution where these are supported.¹⁴⁰

Adil Abd-al-Majid Abd-al-Bari – EIJ Media Leader incarcerated in London

Adil Abd-al-Bari is an Egyptian known as an EIJ media officer. He is a journalist in charge of the EIJ information committee. Adil Abd-al-Bari is currently in custody at the Brixton

¹⁴⁰ Abu Yahya al Libi, "Al-Qaeda's Abu-Yahya al-Libi Discusses 'Jihadi Methodology, Related Issues,'" Open Source Center (September 10, 2007). <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

prison in London pending extradition to the U.S for his involvement in the attacks on the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya on August 7, 1998. He maintained contact with other *mujahidin* such as the famous *jihadi* strategist, Abu Musab al-Suri, and Groupe Islamique Armee Algeria prior to his detention. His response to Sayyid Imam's revisions is the first time he has been in contact with the media since his incarceration.

A peculiar characteristic of Adil Abd-al-Bari's response is that he has not read Sayyid Imam's revisions despite praising Sayyid Imam for his knowledge of Islam and the influence of his previous *jihadi* writings. Despite this, Adil Abd-al-Bari still develops five themes in his criticism of Sayyid Imam's revisions. First, he accuses Sayyid Imam of slander in his criticism of *mujahidin* characterizing Sayyid Imam as arrogant with a condescending personality. Moreover, he chastises Sayyid Imam for accusing his fellow *mujahidin* of what he describes as wrongdoing without evidence or proof. Third, Adil Abd-al-Bari claims that Sayyid Imam's dispute with al-Zawahiri and Usama bin Laden are personal and subjective in nature instead of what he believes should be well-reasoned and objective. He claims that Sayyid Imam's personal dispute with al-Zawahiri is a result of the loss of confidence among the members of EIJ in Sayyid Imam and his belief that members of EIJ, primarily al-Zawahiri, made unwarranted edits of his core *jihadi* text, *The Comprehensive Book about the Pursuit of Glorious Knowledge*. Fourth, he criticizes Sayyid Imam for Sayyid Imam's claim that no one can dispute his revisions because they were taken directly from the Prophet's pronouncements. Adil Abd-al-Bari contends that others have the right to reply and compares Sayyid Imam to the kharijites who believed their Islam was the only true Islam. Finally, Adil Abd-al-Bari questions Sayyid Imam's use of the *hadith* concerning the issue

over the proper use of visas as the *hadith* itself is subject to interpretation and thus not definitive.¹⁴¹

Muhammad Khalil Al-Hakaymah – Deceased al-Qaeda Propaganda

Chief

Muhammad Khalil al-Hakaymah (also known as Mohammad Hasan Khalil al-Hakim and Abu Jihad al-Masri) is a prominent Egyptian *mujahid* and senior member of al-Qaeda. In addition, he was the propaganda and media chief of al-Qaeda. Before his death, he was a leading figure in the Egyptian Islamist¹⁴² movement as head of GI (the rival of al-Zawahiri's and Sayyid Imam's EIJ which ceased violent operations in 1997) and arrested in Egypt for his role in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981 with other *mujahidin* like al-Zawahiri. Al-Hakaymah's is well known in the West for his book, *The Myth of Delusion*, published in 2003 as part of al-Qaeda's attempt to understand and determine the weaknesses of the U.S. intelligence community. His book analyzed U.S. intelligence agencies such as the CIA, NSA and FBI, as well as military and other government intelligence agencies to determine how they are structured and how they operate. However, prior to his reported death, al-Hakaymah wrote his response to Sayyid Imam's revisions on November 26, 2007. It is believed Al-Hakaymah was killed on October 31, 2008 in Pakistan from a U.S. airstrike.

Al-Hakaymah's response revolves around seven primary arguments. First, he rejects the revisions because Sayyid Imam accused other Muslims as being infidels such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Also, al-Hakaymah denies Sayyid Imam's assertion that *mujahidin* have killed

¹⁴¹ Adil Abd-al-Majid Abd-al-Bari, "Egyptian Senior Islamist Replies to Jihad Ex-Leaders Attack on Al-Qa-ida," Open Source Center (August 28, 2008). <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

¹⁴² The term "Islamist" is used in the context of individuals or groups who use and interpret Islam in a political context and purpose.

based on nationality, skin color, and religious denomination. Al-Hakaymah maintains that *mujahidin* have been educated on this and are aware of this issue. Third, al-Hakaymah admits that *mujahidin* are human and as a result are not infallible despite Sayyid Imam's contention that *mujahidin* must exercise the highest standards of conduct. In addition, al-Hakaymah does not agree with Sayyid Imam's characterization that the current condition of Muslims as one of weakness pointing to the successes of Muslims such as the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the Serbs in Bosnia, and the United States in Somalia. Fifth, al-Hakaymah rejects Sayyid Imam's characterization of *mujahidin* as mercenaries, collaborators, and ignorant. Moreover, al-Hakaymah argues the revisions are not legitimate because Sayyid Imam is incarcerated. Finally, al-Hakaymah rejects the revisions because they undermine *jihadi* efforts during what al-Hakaymah describes is a critical time for *mujahidin*. Al-Hakaymah asserts that *mujahidin* do not need this disturbance with all of its current initiatives against the "Crusaders."¹⁴³

Husayn bin Mahmud – Al-Qaeda Internet Personality

Husayn bin Mahmud is an anonymous Internet personality and the pseudonym of an al-Qaeda leader who regularly writes on Islamist forums. His identity and nationality have not been determined. However, the individual who uses this name is well versed with *salafi* Islam and is an acclaimed figure within terrorist forums and terrorism-friendly Internet chat rooms. Based on the responses of suspected al-Qaeda members who regularly use the internet, it is believed bin Mahmud occupies a high position within al-Qaeda. He is believed to be an influential *jihadi* scholar that is hardly known in the West but esteemed in numerous *mujahidin* websites as he is mentioned with Usama bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam, Abu-Muhammad al-Maqdisi, and Abu

¹⁴³ Muhammad Khalil Al-Hakaymah, "Al-Hakaymah Responds to Imam Document Rationalization of Jihad Operations," Open Source Center (November 26, 2007). <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

Yahya al-Libi. While he criticizes the revisions, he expresses his love, respect, and hope for Sayyid Imam's release in his response.

A curious feature of bin Mahmud's response is that he admits he did not read the revisions. Nonetheless, bin Mahmud's criticism is divided into two major themes. First, he doubts Sayyid Imam wrote the revisions and believes Sayyid Imam was not the author. To express his doubt, bin Mahmud points out the similarity of the revisions to those written by the Saudi cleric Sheikh Nasir al-Fahd. Bin Mahmud declares that he will believe in the revisions if Sayyid Imam makes his statements while next to Usama bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. In addition, bin-Mahmud asserts the style in which the revisions were written contradicts the style Sayyid Imam's previous works. Second, bin-Mahmud argues if Sayyid Imam did indeed write the revisions, they were written while in prison and thus a product of torture and coercion. Consequently, bin Mahmud says the revisions are illegitimate. Referring to the revisions of al-Fahd, bin Mahmud notes that al-Fahd warned other *mujahidin* not to heed any of his writings while incarcerated as they would be a product of coercion. Al-Fahd wrote his revisions in 2003 and the Saudi government promoted these revisions. However, prior to his incarceration, al-Fahd was consulted by Usama bin Laden to write the *fatwa* justifying the use of weapons of mass destruction. To emphasize the importance of *jihad*, bin Mahmud claims that even if Usama bin Laden and al-Zawahiri were to recant and retract their previous statements on *jihad*, he asserts the movement would continue because it is the religion of God.¹⁴⁴

Abu Basir al-Tartusi – Leading *Jihadi* Ideologue Living in London

Abu Basir al-Tartusi, is a Syrian *jihadi* ideologue and cleric living in London. He is a major figure in the *jihadi* movement as a leader and a scholar. Currently, al-Tartusi is identified

¹⁴⁴ Husayn Bin-Mahmud, "Mujahidin Cleric Bin-Mahmud Responds to Sayyid Imam's Revisions," Open Source Center (November 20, 2007) (accessed September 5, 2009).

as one of the most influential modern living *jihadi* thinkers¹⁴⁵. He remains very active in the London's *jihadi* scene who protests the detention of Muslims in Great Britain. However, al-Tartusi criticized the July 7, 2005 London bombings and published a *fatwa* two days later that protested the killing of British civilians. Al-Tartusi argued that the bombing was a disgraceful, shameful, and un-Islamic act. His criticism drew angry responses in *jihadi* forums.¹⁴⁶

Despite his criticism of the suicide bombing in Britain, al-Tartusi condemns Sayyid Imam's revisions. Al-Tartusi's argument against Sayyid Imam's revisions focuses on two primary themes. First, the focus of al-Tartusi's opposition against the revisions is Sayyid Imam's requirement of Muslims to be patient, not resist, or rebel against what he describes are unjust, apostate governing tyrants in Muslim countries. Al-Tartusi argues that the one and a half billion Muslims worldwide will not idly stand by and allow such tyrants to continue their rule. Using a metaphor, al-Tartusi asserts that not fighting against these tyrants is similar to when someone tells a sick person not to seek treatment. Instead, al-Tartusi calls for confrontation with the ruling authorities in Muslim countries in the name of *jihad* as the appropriate action in compliance with *sharia*. Al-Tartusi believes that Sayyid Imam tells Muslims that they are too weak to engage in *jihad* or overthrow their oppressive rulers. Al-Tartusi states that more than half of the *Quran* and hundreds of *hadith* call for *jihad* and fighting unjust tyrants. He then asks Sayyid Imam what to do with his large quantity of *sharia* provisions for *jihad*. Second, al-Tartusi questions the authenticity of Sayyid Imam's revisions as they were written while incarcerated. Al-Tartusi believes Sayyid Imam would not have written these revisions if he were not in prison. However, al-Tartusi, in the beginning of his article, agrees with numerous of Sayyid Imam's themes in his revisions such as the sanctity of *al-Ameen* (the peaceful), not to abuse *tartarrus*

¹⁴⁵ William McCants and Jarret Brachman. *Militant Ideology Atlas: Executive Report*. West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2006, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Jarrett M. Brachman, *Global Jihad: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 190.

(human shields), non-Muslims visitors should not be attacked, and that a Muslim's visa to another country is a covenant and contract.¹⁴⁷

Hamid al-Ali – Influential *Jihadi* Cleric

Hamid al-Ali is influential *jihadi* cleric based in Kuwait. He has been identified by the U.S. government as an al-Qaeda facilitator and fundraiser. Hamid al-Ali produces numerous *jihadi* media products on website popular with *mujahidin*. His website addresses topics ranging from Iraq's *Sunni* insurgency to the relationship between al-Qaeda and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Al-Ali has criticized al-Qaeda on his website such as al-Qaeda's relationship with ISI. This has drawn the ire of many al-Qaeda contributors to *mujahidin* forums. However, following the publication of Sayyid Imam's revisions, he welcomed the rejection of violence as a means of fostering change in the Arab world, despite his admission on his website that he had not read them.

Al-Ali's support for Sayyid Imam's revisions focuses on three themes. First, al-Ali maintains the revisions are right and must be supported even if it means the rejection of the use of violence. In addition, al-Ali advocates the revisions as a means to achieving the goals of Islam. Second, he argues that even if Sayyid Imam's revisions may coincide with a political regime's or country's policy, they still have political value as long as these revisions have a positive impact on Islam as a whole. Al-Ali attributes violence and terrorism to political regimes. In fact he argues that it would be a mistake to ignore these revisions. Third, he welcomes and attributes the

¹⁴⁷ Abu Basir al-Tartusi, "Basir al-Tartusi Questions Shaykh Sayyid Imam's Words as Revisions, Retractions," Open Source Center (November 29, 2007). <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

revisions to what he describes as the intellectual and operational maturity that is the hallmark of every society as it evolves.¹⁴⁸

Usamah Ayyub – Former Egyptian *Jihadi* Living as a Political Refugee in Germany

Usamah Ayyub is an Egyptian cleric who is currently a political refugee in Germany where he is the head of the Islamic Center in Munster. Previously, Ayyub was member of the *jihadi* community in Egypt and the former religious head of *Bayt al-Ansar*, which provided safe houses to organize volunteers for *jihad* in Peshawar, Pakistan during the Afghan-Soviet conflict. In addition, he is a close acquaintance of Sayyid Imam and holds Sayyid Imam in the highest regard for his encyclopedic knowledge and respect from Islamists.¹⁴⁹

Ayyub's support for the revisions focuses on three themes. First, Ayyub asserts that Sayyid Imam's revisions must be respected and acknowledged because of Sayyid Imam's significant role and major influence in the development of the principles of *jihadi* ideology. Ayyub states these revisions derive their importance from the fact Sayyid Imam was the first person in the world to establish and delineate the principles and doctrine of *jihadi* ideology and that Sayyid Imam was al-Qaeda's first jurist. Ayyub identifies Sayyid Imam's *Foundations in Preparing Jihad* which serves as the doctrine of *jihad* as a salient example of Sayyid Imam's seminal and noteworthy contributions. Second, Ayyub argues that the revisions fall within the rules of Islam and is not a deal between *mujahidin* and the Egyptian government as Sayyid Imam

¹⁴⁸ Hamid al-Ali, "Kuwaiti Cleric Hamid Al-Ali Responds to Sayyid Imam's Revisions," Open Source Center (December 31, 2007). <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

¹⁴⁹ Lawrence Wright, "The Rebellion Within: An al-Qaeda Mastermind Questions Terrorism," *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008, 2.

is a religious scholar and not a politician. Third Ayyub describes Sayyid Imam's revisions as a critical component of the *jihadi* community's current ideological revisions.¹⁵⁰

Usama Rushdi – Former EIJ Spokesman Living in London

Usama Rushdi is an Egyptian *jihadi* and a former leader, media official, and spokesman of EIJ. He currently resides in Great Britain in exile where he has political asylum. He remains active as an Islamic researcher and editor of the website *Save Egypt Front* that was very critical of the Egyptian regime of President Hosni Mubarak. Ironically, according to the Save Egypt Front website, it is not a political party or religious or ideological organization. Previously, Rushdi was imprisoned with Ayman al-Zawahiri after the assassination of President Sadat and fought with the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

There are two themes in Rushdi's reaction to Sayyid Imam's revision. First, Rushdi fully supports the revisions and acknowledges their significance because of Sayyid Imam's monumental contribution to the doctrine of *jihad* manifested in his core *jihadi* text, *The Comprehensive Book about the Pursuit of Glorious Knowledge*. Rushdi explains this work is considered to be a *jihadi* manifesto used to justify many crimes that had negative consequences on legitimate *jihad* and Islamic acts. Rushdi argues that for Sayyid Imam, the author of this seminal work, to deliver a revision of this work is a significant development. The second theme of Rushdi's reaction is his assertion that Sayyid Imam must provide a much more detailed and extensive revision of his earlier *jihadi* doctrine. Rushdi refers to the great significance of Sayyid Imam's previous works such as *The Comprehensive Book about the Pursuit of Glorious Knowledge* in which Sayyid Imam developed religiously sanctioned rules that were absolute. An example of such absolute rules developed by Sayyid Imam includes the classification of anyone

¹⁵⁰ Usama Ayyub, "Islamist in Germany Views Ideology Revisions by Islamic Jihad Members in Egypt," Open Source Center (November 19, 2007). <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

who supports or participates – even for good intentions – in the political process of regimes *mujahidin* classify as infidels or *kufr*. Sayyid Imam’s earlier works argue that since these regimes are *kufr*, any attempt to support or participate in them is also *kufr*. In his interpretation, these individuals and groups will be identified as *kufr* and *fatwas* should be issued that label them *takfir* and excommunicated from Islam as they are not true Muslims. Such absolute religiously sanctioned rules interpreted by Sayyid Imam in previous works were inflexible for contradictions or revision. As a result, Rushdi calls for a more comprehensive revision of Sayyid Imam’s previous absolute religiously sanction rules and for Sayyid Imam to burn and rewrite his seminal texts, *The Comprehensive Book about the Pursuit of Glorious Knowledge* and *Foundations in Preparing Jihad*, as both are still very influential works among violent extremists.¹⁵¹

Most of the responses against Sayyid Imam highlight his incarceration as the primary reason why his revisions are illegitimate. Such responses view his revisions as illegitimate as they are believed to be the result of torture, coercion, or cooption by the Egyptian or U.S. security services. It appears that al-Zawahari’s ardent response is a product of his own experience in Egyptian prisons where he was tortured and is documented to still harbor regret for revealing the names of other *mujahidin* that became incarcerated as a result of his confessions. However, these responses either do not even attempt to contradict Sayyid Imam’s revisions or if they do, are unable to do so convincingly. These responses allege an oppressive environment in the prison where Sayyid Imam is coerced into writing these revisions. However, a counterpoint to such a response is that Sayyid Qutb, described as the ideological father of *jihad*, wrote his influential manifesto, *Milestones*, while in prison. Consequently the argument that incarceration results in illegitimate writings is untenable. In addition, these responses fail to take into account the long

¹⁵¹ Usama Rushdi, “Report on Reaction to al-Jihad Revisions by Islamists Residing in London,” Open Source Center (November 23, 2007). <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed September 5, 2009).

history of *jihadi* revisionism which began with the call of nonviolence by GI with Sayyid Imam, as former head of EIJ, as part of the evolution of the ongoing revisionism among Egyptian *mujahidin*. Of interest is the fact that in three of the six reactions that do not support the revisions, the authors had not even read *Rationalizing Jihad*. These authors who condemn Sayyid Imam's revisions that did not read *Rationalizing Jihad* include Abu Yahya al-Libi, Adil Abd al-Bari, and Husayn bin Mahmud. In addition, one of Sayyid Imam's detractors, Abu Basir al-Tartusi, agreed with many of Sayyid Imam's positions to include not to abuse *tartarrus* (human shields), non-Muslims visitors should not be attacked, and that a Muslim's visa to another country is a covenant and contract. Three of nine responses supported the revisions and implored Sayyid Imam to write even more to comprehensively revise and address his earlier influential *jihadi* works of *Foundations in Preparing Jihad* and *The Comprehensive Book about the Pursuit of Glorious Knowledge*. However, as will be discussed below, this may not have to be done as LIFG has provided an exhaustive account of its condemnation of violence and terrorism in its *Recantations*.

The LIFG's *Recantations* a prominent example of a challenge from the Muslim community worldwide to the violence and terrorism conducted by violent extremists such as al-Qaeda. In fact, the number of challenges from the Muslim community worldwide is increasing. Including *Recantations*, there was a total of five challenges from prominent members of the worldwide Muslim community between the winter of 2009 and the summer of 2010. The other four challenges to violent extremists such as al-Qaeda includes the establishment of the Quilliam Group, The New Mardin Declaration, Dr. Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri's *fatwa* against suicide bombing and terrorism, and Dr. Umar Abd al Kafy's criticism of al-Qaeda's ideology and terrorist operations.

The Growing Literature against Al-Qaeda and Violent Extremism

There is ample literature that questions whether or not there are challenges to the ideology and harmful acts of violent extremists such as al-Qaeda from the Muslim community worldwide. In addition to the revisionism of *mujahidin* groups such as GI and EIJ which deepens the rift in al-Qaeda's *jihadi* ideology, there are numerous initiatives from prominent members of the worldwide Muslim community that challenges violent extremists such as al-Qaeda. Sayyid Imam and other *mujahidin* revisionists not only deepen the rift in al-Qaeda's ideology but they pose a significant challenge to al-Qaeda's legitimacy. These initiatives, on the other hand, contribute considerably to the challenges to al-Qaeda as they include the full spectrum of Muslims from former *mujahidin* to respected Islamic leaders and groups. Former *mujahidin* challenges include LIFG and founders of the Quilliam Group. Respected Islamic leaders and groups that counter, criticize, and discredit violent extremist groups such as al-Qaeda include the Islamic scholars and religious authorities that wrote the New Mardin Declaration, Dr. Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri, and Dr. Umar Abd al Kafy. All five of these initiatives represent voices from the Muslim community worldwide that criticize, condemn, and discredit not only violent extremists but also the misinterpretation and misapplication of Islam.

Libyan Islamic Fighting Group

The LIFG is a violent extremist group formed by Libyan veterans of the Soviet-Afghan conflict that aims to overthrow the Libyan regime and establish an Islamic state. LIFG is a key regional affiliate of al-Qaeda that has played a key role in al-Qaeda with very strong ties. In 2008 Ayman al-Zawahiri claimed LIFG had joined al-Qaeda. In fact three prominent LIFG leaders are leaders in al-Qaeda to include Abu Yahya al-Libi who is al-Qaeda's heir apparent, Abu Laith al-Libi, and Atiyah Abdul-Rahman who is a senior member, recruiter, and facilitator of al-Qaeda. However, the latter two were killed in drone attacks in Pakistan in 2008 and 2010 respectively.

More importantly, the most prominent leaders of LIFG to include Noman Benotman, a former LIFG leader; Abd al-Wahhab al-Qayed, the elder brother of Abu-Yahya al-Libi; Abu Yahya al-Mundher, well-respected and praised by al-Qaeda to include al-Zawahiri; and the senior leaders of jailed LIFG members¹⁵² denounce al-Qaeda, violence, and terrorism. Their renunciation on the use of violence is manifested in their publication of their comprehensive and exhaustive revisions over 400 pages long entitled *Corrective Studies in Understanding Jihad, Accountability and the Judgment of People* or known more shortly as *Recantations* in September 2009.¹⁵³ In *Recantations* LIFG develops a new *jihadi* code in which it recants its previously held *jihadi* ideology and revises it by condemning violence and terrorism.

The significance and influence of this document is not only demonstrated by the renunciation by its authors who were former members of LIFG, but also as a more complete and thorough revision of *jihadi* ideology than Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad*. Criticisms of *Rationalizing Jihad*, such as from Usama Rushdi detailed earlier, call for Sayyid Imam to provide a much more in-depth and extensive revision of his earlier *jihadi* doctrine. The authors of *Recantations* have taken this into account in their revisions and thus have contributed significantly to the renunciation of violence and violent extremists.¹⁵⁴ One of the hallmarks of LIFG's *Recantations* is that it does not mention any person or group at all and therefore avoids

¹⁵² Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, "A Selected Translation of the LIFG Recantation Document," Translated by Mohammed Ali Musawi, QuilliamFoundation.org, 2009, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/acatalog/books.html> (accessed October 10, 2010), 4. This includes 'Abd al-Hakim Balhaj a.k.a. Abu 'Abd Allah al-Sadiq (Emir of the LIFG), Abu al-Mundher al-Saidi (Spiritual Leader of LIFG), Khalid Sharif, Miftah al-Duwdi, and Mustafa Qanaifid, Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

¹⁵³ Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, "Recantations," Open Source Center (September 17, 2009), <https://www.opensource.gov/public/content.html> (accessed November 12, 2009).

¹⁵⁴ Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, "A Selected Translation of the LIFG Recantation Document," Translated by Mohammed Ali Musawi, 5. "...it seems that the LIFG leadership have taken Zawahiri's criticism [of Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad* in his *Exoneration*] into account while writing their own revisions, making sure to put their own past into the context of ignorance and other circumstances they claim to be the reason for their errors. The LIFG spent a considerable amount of time and exerted a great deal of effort in producing this highly detailed and methodically sound jurisprudential study which cannot be accused of having "an unscientific approach."

the potential denudation of the efficacy of their arguments by reverting to personal attacks.

Consequently, these recantations are a credible challenge and weaken al-Qaeda by undermining its religious foundation for waging *jihad* against Muslim regimes and killing innocent civilians.

LIFG's *Recantations* focus on seven primary themes in its renunciation of violence and revision of its *jihadi* ideology. First, LIFG attributes the lack of religious knowledge as the primary cause of the errors in religious interpretation and religious violations. Consequently, LIFG asserts that only *ulema* (Muslim legal scholars) are qualified to issue *fatwas* (religious ruling or edict) since they have extensively studied the *Quran*, *sharia*, and *hadith* from recognized institutions of Muslim learning. This is a contradiction to the *fatwas* issued by al-Qaeda leaders like Usama bin-Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri because both are not *ulema* and thus not allowed to issue *fatwas*. Furthermore, they recant their previous position on violence and proclaim that it is impermissible to use violence to effect change or introduce reform in Muslim countries. Third, LIFG declares that the killing of persons such as women and children is prohibited. Moreover, LIFG explains there are strict rules on *khilaf* (disagreements) among Muslims which is encouraged but is managed only by *ulema* who are qualified personnel. Unity and coalition is emphasized in *khilaf* which is in stark opposition to the highly contentious and contradictory nature of al-Qaeda's views on Muslims and non-Muslims who do not agree or adhere to their exclusionist ideology. Fifth, *Recantations* maintains that extremism is reprehensible within the guidelines of *sharia*, contrary to Islam, and the result of the views of unqualified leaders who are inadequately educated. While not mentioning any names or groups, this is a direct criticism of violent extremists such as al-Qaeda and Usama bin Laden whose fundamentalism¹⁵⁵ is attributed to his insufficient education in Islam. Additionally, LIFG

¹⁵⁵ John Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 33. "Fundamentalism: the activist affirmation of a particular faith that defines that faith in an absolutist and literalist manner."

proclaims that using violence to change evil for any reason is absolutely forbidden and that evil is forbidden and renounced. Seventh, LIFG argues that accusing someone or a group as apostates – declaring *takfir* and using this to legitimate violence – is very dangerous, not to be taken lightly, and is a religious matter. LIFG argues that many who have declared others as apostate often lacks religious knowledge and is unqualified to make such a judgment which is a criticism of numerous violent extremists who often make such accusations.¹⁵⁶

The Quilliam Group

The Quilliam Group is the world's first counter-extremist think tank established in the spring of 2010 co-founded by two former members of radical¹⁵⁷ Islamist organizations. It is an independent organization based out of London, Great Britain. The group is named after a nineteenth century British convert to Islam, Abdullah Quilliam, who was known for advocating Islam in Britain. The Quilliam Group's three stated tenets are to challenge extremism, promote pluralism, and inspire change. Its goal is to design frameworks to counter violent extremist ideology through informed and inclusive discussion.

The group advocates the advancement of liberal democratic values such as religious freedom, human rights, citizenship, identity, and the sense of belonging to a nation or society. The group accomplishes this through speaking engagements, its website, and publications. The group is composed of academics, researchers, and former members of radical Islamist organizations to include both co-founders, Maajid Nawaz and Ed Husain, and Noman Benotman who was formerly a leader of the LIFG. The critique of radical Islamism by these former

¹⁵⁶ Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, "A Selected Translation of the LIFG Recantation Document," Translated by Mohammed by Mohammed Ali Musawi, QuilliamFoundation.org, 2009, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/acatalog/books.html> (accessed October 10, 2010), 13-28.

¹⁵⁷ Radical is the term used by these members to describe themselves while they were a part of their violent extremist organizations. Their self-description as radicals connotes a fundamentalism – a literal and absolutist interpretation of their religion.

members is based on their personal experiences and consequently results in a very powerful and convincing message against violent extremist organizations such as al-Qaeda.

The Quilliam Group's counter-extremist efforts are separated into four parts. First, the Research and Policy Unit generates research based on evidence to assist other think tanks, research institutes, and academics to develop programs to counter extremism. Second, the Training and Consultancy section provides radicalization awareness training so individuals and groups can identify the seeds of radicalism and provide a comprehensive ideological and theological refutation of extremist thought. Third, the South Asia Unit focuses on challenging extremism and promoting democratic ideals in Pakistan. Finally, the Outreach section proactively engages the widest audience from businesses, academia, the military, and religious leaders to discuss and debate counter-extremism.

Since its inception, the Quilliam Group has published over twenty monographs that contribute to a better understanding of extremism from the development of Islamism to mosques in Britain to discrediting al-Qaeda. Two pivotal examples of the latter include Noman Benotman's Letter to Usama bin Laden¹⁵⁸ and Camille Tawil's *The Other Face of Al-Qaeda*.¹⁵⁹ Camille Tawil is a prominent journalist who has written for the al-Hayat newspaper in London for almost two decades. Benotman's letter urges Usama bin Laden and al-Qaeda to halt their violence, reconsider its goals and strategy, and revert back to what he describes as authentic Islamic rulings. Benotman reveals that, despite his warnings to Usama bin Laden prior to 9/11, al-Qaeda's operations have only served to worsen the plight of Muslims globally and resulted in

¹⁵⁸ Noman Benotman, "Al-Qaeda: Your Armed Struggle is Over," *QuilliamFoundation.org*, September 10, 2010, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/index.php/component/content/article/690> (accessed September 11, 2010).

¹⁵⁹ Camille Tawil, "The Other Face of Al-Qaeda," Translated by Maryam El-Hajbi and Mustafa Abulhimal, *QuilliamFoundation.org*, November 2010, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/acatalog/Books.html> (accessed December 5, 2010).

unjustifiable mass killings of both Muslims and non-Muslims. He calls for an end to al-Qaeda's violence as it has only resulted in destruction, hatred, and humiliation of Muslims, and the strengthening of authoritarian regimes. This assessment of the consequences of al-Qaeda's violence is similar to that of Sayyid Imam's criticism and condemnation of al-Qaeda like his fellow *mujahidin* revisionists.

Tawil, on the other hand, argues that there is an alternate and more accurate version of al-Qaeda that contradicts the familiar and established image, narrative, or perception of the organization. Tawil argues that contrary to the perception of al-Qaeda as an organized, visionary, and intellectually unified group, it is a chaotic, reckless, and disorganized entity that often feuds with its members and affiliates. In addition, he discloses that Usama bin Laden abrogated his loyalty and allegiance to Mullah Omar¹⁶⁰ by attacking the United States and provoking U.S. retaliation despite protestations from Arab and Afghan associates of Usama bin Laden and a directive by Mullah Omar not to attack. Third, Tawil divulges the inefficacy and cowardice of al-Qaeda military operations in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 by failing to send fighters to defend Kabul, failing to defend Kandahar airport, and fleeing into the Tora Bora which Usama bin Laden personally led. Both Benotman and Tawil represent two prominent examples of challenges to al-Qaeda from the Quilliam Group.

The New Mardin Declaration

On March 27 and 28, 2010, Muslim scholars convened in Mardin, Turkey to renounce, reexamine, and revise the Mardin *fatwa* of 14th century Muslim scholar, the influential Ibn Taymiyyah. The significance of Ibn Taymiyyah's Mardin *fatwa* is that it is used by violent extremists to falsely justify terrorism and indiscriminate murder in the name of Islam. In Ibn

¹⁶⁰ Leader of the Taliban who welcomed non-Afghan fighters into Afghanistan to help fight the Soviets.

Taymiyyah's *fatwa*, violence and terrorism are justified to use in the name of Islam against foreign invaders. The context in which this was written was during the time Mongols, while Muslims, seriously threatened the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, Ibn Taymiyyah issued a *fatwa* that allowed violence to counter the Mongol threat. The New Mardin Declaration of 2010 abrogates Ibn Taymiyyah's *fatwa*. This was a momentous event because authoritative Muslim scholars from a diverse range of Islamic schools of thought representing the majority of the Muslim community worldwide from countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, India, Senegal, Kuwait, Bosnia, Iran, Morocco, Mauritania, and Indonesia attended the conference and reached a consensus. In addition, it is of symbolic significance as Mardin is the city where Ibn Taymiyyah authored and named his *fatwa*.

These Muslim clerics and leaders agreed Ibn Taymiyyah's Mardin *fatwa* has been misinterpreted and misapplied. All of them agreed that terrorism and indiscriminate murder from violent extremist organizations such as al-Qaeda cannot be justified under Islam. Instead, they introduced a New Mardin Declaration composed of seven essential components that condemns terrorism and indiscriminate murder. First, the acts of terrorist groups are not *jihad* but arbitrary murder. Second, the original Mardin *fatwa* has been misinterpreted and cannot be used to justify terrorism or violence. In addition, it calls for all Muslims to live up to the highest ethical and legal standards. Fourth, it declares Islam categorically forbids indiscriminate killing and murder. Moreover, it proclaims that terrorists destroy their own faith and dishonor Islam through their actions. Sixth, it maintains that the modern world is characterized by tolerance, peaceful coexistence, civil states, and international treaties. Finally, *jihad* can only be declared by heads of state and *fatwas* can only be issued by *mufti* who are fully qualified in scholarly learning and knowledge.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Mardin The Abode of Peace, "The New Mardin Declaration," <http://www.mardin-fatwa.com/about.php?id=4> (accessed April 1, 2010).

Dr. Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri

Dr. Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri is a prominent Pakistani Islamic scholar and cleric. As a leading Islamic scholar, ul-Qadri has practiced Islamic jurisprudence and taught Islamic law at various law schools in Pakistan. As one of Pakistan's leading Islamic scholars, ul-Qadri is an authoritative leader on the *Quran* and Islamic law. He is famous and influential in the Muslim community as a classically trained Islamic scholar and founder of the Minhaj organizations (the international organization, the welfare foundation, and university) which aims for the betterment of the masses, their enlightenment, and presentation of a realistic and rational view of Islam. Dr. ul-Qadri promotes education and religious moderation, peace and integration, interfaith dialog, women's rights and empowerment, and social welfare and human rights.¹⁶² His promotion of such moderate views and the integration of religions and communities are in stark contrast to the narrow focus of the Islam interpreted by violent extremists. In addition, Dr. ul-Qadri is a staunch supporter of peace and strongly condemns violence and terrorism. Consequently, Dr. ul-Qadri has been targeted by the Pakistani Taliban, *Tehrik-e-Taliban* for death.¹⁶³

In March 2010, ul-Qadri published a 600-page *fatwa* entitled *Fatwa on Suicide Bombings and Terrorism* which not only categorically condemns violence and terrorism perpetrated by such violent extremist organizations such as al-Qaeda but also proclaims these perpetrators are condemned to hell.¹⁶⁴ This *fatwa* is a comprehensive and systematic theological and legal refutation and denunciation of the use of violence and terrorism. It is an exhaustive and

¹⁶² Minhaj-ul-Quran International UK, "Aims and Objectives," <http://minhajuk.org/minhajuk/index.php/Aims-Objectives/> (accessed April 1, 2010).

¹⁶³ Christian Caryl, "Sheikh to Terrorist: Go to Hell," *Foreign Policy*, April 14, 2010, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/14/sheikh_to_terrorists_go_to_hell (accessed April 19, 2010).

¹⁶⁴ Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri, "Introduction to the Fatwa Against Suicide Bombings and Terrorism," <http://www.minhajbooks.com/english/control/Download/bid/376/cid/8/Fatwa-Suicide-Bombing-and-Terrorism-by-Shaykh-ul-Islam-Dr-Muhammad-Tahir-ul-Qadri.html> (accessed April 1, 2010).

encyclopedic compilation of Islamic jurisprudence that condemns terrorism. Not only does ul-Qadri's reputation as an esteemed Islamic scholar lend credibility to this *fatwa*, a review of the significant array of classical Islamic sources and use of the *Quran* to defend his position demonstrates his document as a persuasive and powerful source to challenge, dismantle, and delegitimize the ideology of violent extremists. Lending to its legitimacy as a complete theological rebuttal of the ideology of violent extremists, ul-Qadri's *fatwa* has been welcomed by the Quilliam Group.

There are six primary themes in ul-Qadri's condemnation of violence and terrorism. First, he vehemently declares that killing Muslims and terrorism is not only unlawful and forbidden by Islam but is a rejection of faith and infidelity that runs counter to Islamic teaching. Consequently, ul-Qadri asserts that those who commit violence in the name of Islam and terrorism are unbelievers, totally out of the fold of Islam, and is not *jihad*. In addition, terrorism is wrong no matter how good the intentions. He maintains that those who do kill others are condemned to go to hell. Furthermore, he articulates that evil cannot become good under any circumstance. Ul-Qadri argues that if an evil act is committed in what is believed or perceived for a good cause, the act can never be good under any condition as the intent and act are evil. This is similar to Sayyid Imam's argument that the ends never justify the means. Third, referring to the sanctity of human life in the *Quran*, ul-Qadri affirms that killing anyone – for example women and children – is unlawful and forbidden. Not only is killing blasphemous but it is also an act of infidelity to Islam. Ul-Qadri maintains that bloodshed is the greatest of all crimes. Additionally, he reminds readers that the protection of life, honor, and property is not only for Muslims but also applies to non-Muslims. Fifth, ul-Qadri announces that armed struggle in the form of rebellion, revolt, civil war, and terrorism against a Muslim state and its rulers is prohibited. He notes that reform of a Muslim state and its rulers is encouraged but through legal, constitutional, political, and democratic means. As in killing another person, those who engage in armed struggle against the state are condemned to hell. Finally, he declares that modern terrorists

are apostates in the same way the *Khawarij*¹⁶⁵ are universally viewed by the Muslim community as apostates.¹⁶⁶

Dr. Umar Abd al Kafy

Dr. Umar Abd al Kafy is an Egyptian Islamic scholar and well-known Egyptian television preacher based out of Dubai, United Arab Emirates. He is an influential moderate and mainstream Islamic theologian who is a member of the world renowned and respected International Union of Muslim Scholars. His degrees are in Islamic studies and comparative jurisprudence. In addition, al-Kafy is a member of the Dubai International *Quran* Competition, Director of the Quranic Studies Center in Dubai, and popular *khatib* or prayer leader for Friday sermons and *Eid* or Islamic festivals. He also maintains a website that contains his Islamic teachings, writings, and sermons in audio, video, and text. He is a prolific contributor to the media from YouTube videos, to speeches at women's groups, to addressing Muslims in non-Muslim countries, and to leading Quranic reading competitions. Consequently, al-Kafy is a very influential Islamic personality.

During a television interview on Dubai's al-Arabiya TV on July 16, 2010, al-Kafy criticized the strategy and theological foundation of al-Qaeda's ideology. Al-Kafy presents six criticisms of al-Qaeda's ideology. First, al-Kafy argues that violent extremists like al-Qaeda who declare *jihad* on anyone that says there is no God but Allah does not know Islam. Additionally,

¹⁶⁵ *Khawarij* are ones who rebel against the acknowledged Muslim ruler whom Islam obliges every Muslim to obey and not rebel against. Kharijites were members of an Islamic sect in late 7th and early 8th century distinct from Sunnis and Shiites. The origins of Kharijites lie in the strife over political supremacy over the Muslim community worldwide in the years following the death of Muhammad. Kharijite theology was a form of radical fundamentalism, preaching uncompromising observance of the teachings of *Quran* in defiance of corrupt authorities. Extreme Kharijites considered by moderate Muslims to be 'hypocrites' or 'unbelievers', who could be killed with impunity; this practice is called *takfir*.

¹⁶⁶ Muhammad Tahir ul-Adri, "Introduction to the Fatwa on Suicide Bombings and Terrorism," <http://www.minhajbooks.com/english/control/Download/bid/376/cid/8/Fatwa-Suicide-Bombing-and-Terrorism-by-Shaykh-ul-Islam-Dr-Muhammad-Tahir-ul-Qadri.html> (accessed April 1, 2010).

jihād can only be declared by a recognized *Wali al-Amr* or Muslim ruler or guardian which al-Qaeda is not. Third, killing civilians and terrorizing innocent people is not *jihād* as prescribed and demonstrated by al-Qaeda. Furthermore, Usama bin Laden's *fatwa* to kill all Americans in Muslim countries is contrary to Islam which does not allow them to be killed if they are peaceful. Fifth, al-Kafy argues that al-Qaeda's interpretation of *hakimiyah* or a ruler or governor is incorrect. Al-Qaeda views *hakimiyah* as a call for theocratic government. Instead, al-Kafy argues, *hakimiyah* is the selection of rulers or governors through a *shura* or consultation or through democratic means. Finally, al-Kafy condemns al-Qaeda's distortion of the concept of *tartarrus* or use of human shields to justify the death of innocent Muslims. Al-Kafy explains that al-Qaeda revived an obscure medieval ruling that allows the killing of Muslims in order to justify the deaths of innocent Muslims as a result of suicide attacks. However, al-Kafy argues that there is a significant difference between someone who martyrs himself in the midst of an enemy occupier and one who blows himself up among peaceful people as the latter example is not martyrdom nor prescribed in the *Quran*.¹⁶⁷

These five initiatives from the worldwide Muslim community demonstrate that there is a significant challenge to violent extremists and al-Qaeda. All five initiatives counter, condemn, and discredit the misinterpretation and misapplication of Islam by violent extremists such as al-Qaeda. These initiatives are voices from within the worldwide Muslim community that criticize and condemn the use of violence in the name of and in defense of Islam. Unlike Sayyid Imam, there has been no response or reaction from al-Qaeda to *Recantations*, the Quilliam Group, Dr. ul-Qadri, or Dr. al Kafy. Al-Qaeda affiliate leader, Anwar al-Awlaki of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula attempted to attack the New Mardin Declaration in late 2010. However, his attempted

¹⁶⁷ The Jamestown Foundation, "In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror, Prominent Egyptian Preacher Dissects Al-Qaeda Strategy," *Terrorism Monitor*, July 29, 2010, 1-2.

refutation is described more as an emotive response than a theological rebuttal.¹⁶⁸ Consequently, al-Qaeda has not presented a convincing or viable response to any of these initiatives. These initiatives are the voices of what is believed and reflected in the Muslim community worldwide.

These voices are significant because of the credibility of these initiatives. First, LIFG, like the Egyptian *mujahidin* revisionists of GI and EIJ, represent a growing trend of *mujahidin* that renounce violence and are revising their ideology and strategy. Second, The New Mardin Declaration that denounces violence, terrorism, and indiscriminate murder, was agreed upon by a consensus of both political and religious leaders from the entire Muslim world. This is momentous because it is not often an entire community that is so diverse and geographically dispersed that unanimously agrees on such a consensus. Finally, two internationally respected Islamic scholars whose academic credentials are beyond reproach, Dr. ul-Qadri and Dr. al Kafy, provide their condemnation of violence and violent extremists which ultimately contributes to the Muslim challenge to al-Qaeda. These challenges are critical because of the legitimacy they bring as emanating from within the Muslim community. Non-Muslim challenges do not carry as much weight as those that originate from within the Muslim community. Consequently, such Muslim initiatives must continue to be identified and amplified by both the Muslim and non-Muslim community worldwide as they are legitimate and formidable challenges to violent extremists and al-Qaeda. Through such initiatives the war of ideas, the ideology of al-Qaeda and violent extremists, may be defeated.

Conclusion and Recommendations

An analysis of Sayyid Imam's *Rationalizing Jihad*, al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration*, and the nine reactions from former and current *mujahidin* demonstrate that there is a growing rift in al-

¹⁶⁸ Jack Barclay, "Anwar al-Awlaki Attacks Mardin Conference's Declaration on Jihad," *Terrorism Monitor* Volume VIII, Issue 42 (November 18, 2010): 6-8.

Qaeda's *jihadi* ideology. In addition, Sayyid Imam, *mujahidin* revisionists, and the five initiatives clearly illustrate that there are significant challenges to violent extremists and al-Qaeda that critically delegitimize their ideology, tactics, and strategy. These challenges that originate from within the worldwide Muslim community carries a legitimacy and consensus that violent extremists and al-Qaeda strive and hope to imitate. However, violent extremists and al-Qaeda do not appear they will be able to garner this legitimacy and consensus because of the criticism, condemnation, and delegitimization from the worldwide Muslim community.

Despite this criticism and condemnation, additional research should be conducted on the five initiatives described above and all future literature that counters, condemns, and undermines al-Qaeda to develop a military strategy that incorporates these initiatives and continues to monitor and analyze future initiatives that challenges al-Qaeda's ideology. These initiatives will serve to accentuate and amplify the rift that will ultimately result in the defeat of al-Qaeda. In addition to accentuating and amplifying the growing condemnation against al-Qaeda that emanates from the Muslim community worldwide the world should reiterate its commitment to international norms and universal values.¹⁶⁹ International efforts to counter al-Qaeda's ideology and exploit this rift must categorically denounce al-Qaeda's barbaric and brutal methods as illegitimate, immoral, and unethical according to the Muslim faith, Islamic jurisprudence, and internationally recognized standards. The contrast between international norms that put a value on human life and dignity and the morally bankrupt ideology of al-Qaeda that results in the deaths of numerous innocents will serve to deepen the rift, delegitimize al-Qaeda, and ultimately defeat it as an organization and movement. The growing literature and sentiment against al-Qaeda from religious scholars,

¹⁶⁹ Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington D.C.: The White House, May 2010), 35. "The United States believe certain values are universal and will work to promote them worldwide. These include an individual's freedom to speak their mind, assemble without fear, worship as they please, and choose their own leaders; they also include dignity, tolerance, and equality among all people, and the fair and equitable administration of justice."

former fighters, and militants with *jihadi* credentials forms a very powerful riposte to al-Qaeda's brutality with significant potential repercussions. This literature and sentiment, properly understood and exploited, will accelerate the internal collapse of violent extremists such as al-Qaeda.¹⁷⁰ It is likely that al-Qaeda will be unable to cope with the challenges emanating from within the Muslim community worldwide.

The ideological rift in al-Qaeda's ideology as demonstrated by Sayyid Imam's revisions in *Rationalizing Jihad* and al-Zawahiri's response in *Exoneration* should continue to be amplified and exploited to condemn al-Qaeda, delegitimize its ideology, and ultimately defeat it as an organization. Presenting various points of views from supporters of al-Zawahiri to Islamic jurisprudence to the literature against al-Qaeda from respected Muslim leaders and former *mujahidin* will only serve to defeat al-Qaeda's ideology. As demonstrated previously in al-Zawahiri's *Exoneration*, al-Qaeda's interpretation of Islam contravenes classical Islamic jurisprudence. Ideologically and philosophically, al-Qaeda's legitimacy is seriously undermined for its failure to adhere to classical Islamic jurisprudence. This is accentuated on a practical level because al-Qaeda is routinely condemned for declaring other Muslims apostates, attacking fellow Muslims, women, and children, and creating political and social chaos. Consequently, a holistic whole of government approach that incorporates the rift in al-Qaeda's ideology with its failure to adhere to Islamic jurisprudence, attacks on innocent people, and the excessive violence it generates, will only serve to defeat al-Qaeda's center of gravity, its ideology.

Numerous recommendations to defeat al-Qaeda have been offered. A useful one focuses on defeating al-Qaeda's ideology that is part of what is called an Integrated Long War Campaign (ILWCP) that supports the national strategy is one offered in a recent paper entitled *The Serpent*

¹⁷⁰ Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, "The Unraveling: Al-Qaeda's Revolt Against Bin Laden," *The New Republic*, June 11, 2004, 21. "...the repudiation of Al-Qaeda's leaders by its former religious, military, and political guides will help hasten the implosion of the mujahidin terrorist movement."

*in our Garden: Al-Qa'ida and the Long War.*¹⁷¹ This work establishes a campaign plan to defeat al-Qaeda's ideology in a war of ideas which includes exposing al-Qaeda's ideological inconsistencies, discrediting their *ulema*, create a distinctive alternative, and discredit al-Qaeda's *jihad* as inconsistent with Islamic jurisprudence.¹⁷² This paper correctly identifies al-Qaeda's center of gravity as its ideology which continues to inspire, radicalize, motivate, and receive, generate, and sustain support. In addition, more general prescriptions in this campaign plan include identifying and exploiting strategic opportunities such as Sayyid Imam's revisions; read, understand, counter, and "steal" al-Qaeda's playbook such as using its eight step plan against it; and attacking al-Qaeda's weaknesses and vulnerabilities such as its excessive and counterproductive violence.¹⁷³ These recommendations provide an excellent framework and a foundation that is both holistic and uses the whole of government approach to defeat al-Qaeda. A policy recommendation is to first clearly establish the distinction between the worldwide community of Muslims and the violent extremists such as al-Qaeda. Once this distinction is firmly established, the recommendation is to explicitly target these violent extremists to support two mutually reinforcing goals: undermine the legitimacy of al-Qaeda and reaffirm support for the overwhelming majority of the Muslim community worldwide.

Two important messages are critical in condemning and discrediting al-Qaeda's ideology. They include that *mujahidin* want a totalitarian system of government in which no one is allowed to think for themselves. Anyone who does not share their understanding of Islam will be declared an apostate and executed. If you want to know what type of government *mujahidin* will institute, review the brutal methods of both the Taliban in Afghanistan and al-Qaeda in Iraq. Second, the *jihadi* message is so weak and unappealing that violence must be used to persuade people. They

¹⁷¹ COL Brian M. Drinkwine, "The Serpent in Our Garden: Al-Qa'ida and the Long War," *Strategic Studies Institute* (January 2009), 40-54.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 45-51.

claim to be saving Islam, but they are giving it a bad reputation. They are hurting their own people and national resources. These messages will serve to amplify and exploit the ongoing rift in al-Qaeda's ideology and challenge al-Qaeda as an organization and movement.

Operationally, this rift may be used by Combatant Commanders (COCOM) to discredit al-Qaeda's ideology and accentuate the differences between the goals of al-Qaeda and those of the local population. The goal of this effort is to make al-Qaeda less attractive to the local population. COCOMs may use the growing literature against al-Qaeda to add legitimacy to their efforts to dispute, denounce, and discredit al-Qaeda's ideology. Identifying and exploiting this ideological rift can serve as a means to delegitimize and undermine al-Qaeda in their respective theaters. Recommended command messages include the existence of a rift, that al-Qaeda's ideology is unethical, immoral, and illegal, and there is a growing number within the Muslim community worldwide – respected leaders and former *mujahidin* - who condemn and refute al-Qaeda's ideology. Whole of government efforts such as information operations coupled with diplomatic efforts and public affairs initiatives must be employed to effectively refute al-Qaeda's ideology.

COCOMs must co-opt locals to promote a counter narrative or alternate ideology to al-Qaeda using this rift as a start point. COCOMs must avoid unilateral efforts to identify and exploit this rift as they must put a local face on any attempt to delegitimize al-Qaeda's ideology. Despite the best of intentions, U.S. efforts to indirectly support local initiatives to counter al-Qaeda's ideology may result in the delegitimization of these local efforts of authorities. This is because such U.S. efforts may be viewed as U.S.-led or developed instead of by the local government itself. Consequently, COCOMs must work closely with local authorities to reinforce this rift and these challenges.

A prescription to defeat al-Qaeda was provided by al-Qaeda's foremost religious ideologue, Abu Yahya al-Libi, on September 9, 2007 in a video. The six steps to defeat al-Qaeda include:

- Amplify the cases of ex-*mujahidin* who have renounced violent extremist Islamism
- Fabricate stories and exaggerate *jihadi* mistakes
- Encourage mainstream Muslim clerics to issue *fatwas* that incriminate *mujahidin*
- Strengthen and support Islam far removed from *jihad*
- Neutralize or discredit influential *jihadi* thinkers
- Exaggerate minor disagreements among *jihadi* leaders as being major disputes¹⁷⁴

This is an example of a framework to defeat al-Qaeda coming not only from within the Muslim community worldwide but from the leading religious ideologue of al-Qaeda itself. A positive development is that the growing literature and sentiment against al-Qaeda includes many of the prescriptions Abu Yahya al-Libi recommends. The next step will be to include this prescription into the whole of government strategy to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda. In addition, to strengthen the efforts against violent extremists such as al-Qaeda, a comprehensive and unified vision and strategy must be developed by the Muslim community worldwide that incorporates all of these challenges and accentuates the rift.

Using Kantian phraseology, it is the U.S. governments' categorical imperative to identify, amplify, and exploit the rift in and challenges to al-Qaeda's ideology because it is only through the denunciation and delegitimization of al-Qaeda's ideas that it can be defeated. The action of defeating al-Qaeda's violent extremist ideology is imperative because, according to Kant's Third Maxim, a person acts morally when he or she acts as if his or her conduct was establishing a universal law governing others in similar circumstances. It is of the utmost necessity to gain an effective situational understanding of this rift as it serves as the foundation to ultimately defeat al-

¹⁷⁴ Jarret Brachman, "Abu Yahya's Six Easy Steps for Defeating al-Qaeda," Perspectives on Terrorism (Volume 1, Issue 5) (accessed September 5, 2009).

Qaeda. Time is of the essence as the violent extremist ideology of al-Qaeda continues to inspire and motivate groups and individuals to kill innocents worldwide – most of them Muslim.

However, the U.S. is not the only stakeholder in this effort. The Muslim community worldwide has a significant stake not only because they suffer the brunt of al-Qaeda's violent extremist ideology¹⁷⁵ but because of their refusal to be characterized by a small minority and radically fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. The global Muslim community is a part of the international community so al-Qaeda and its violent extremist ideology must be defeated to demonstrate that the Muslim community worldwide does not accept al-Qaeda's brutality and exceptionalism. The sentiment of the worldwide Muslim community against al-Qaeda and Usama bin Laden is at an all time low and support has been decreasing significantly in the past decade.¹⁷⁶ This presents an opportunity to exploit using Sayyid Imam's revisions as an analytical and intellectual foundation to undermine al-Qaeda. Sayyid Imam is an influential figure in *jihad* because of the critical role he played in developing the ideological foundation of *jihad* – the one al-Qaeda uses today. His comprehensive revisions significantly undermine the legitimacy of al-Qaeda. Sayyid Imam has created a rift in al-Qaeda's ideology. However, the same individual who created the ideological foundation of *jihad* that guides al-Qaeda plays a critical role in destroying it.

¹⁷⁵ Scott Helfstein, Nassir Abdullah, and Muhammad al-Obaidi, "Deadly Vanguard: A Study of al-Qa'ida's Violence Against Muslims," *Combating Terrorism Center*, December 2009, 2. "From 2004 to 2008, only 15% of the 3,010 victims were Western...From 2006 to 2008, only 2% are from the West, and the remaining 98% are inhabitants of countries with Muslim majorities."

¹⁷⁶ Pew Research Center, "Global Attitude Project: Muslim Report," (December 2, 2010): 8-9.

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